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## Single Mothers by Choice: A Nontraditional Alternative to Mothering

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SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE  
A Nontraditional Alternative to Mothering

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by  
Kimberly Kay Harris  
1988

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is gratefully dedicated to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Harris, who gave me the support and encouragement I needed to begin this project; and to my future husband, Joseph David Boyd, who showed me I had the heart to finish it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v.
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi.
ABSTRACT.....	viii.
INTRODUCTION.....	2
CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELEVANT LITERATURE.....	6
CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY.....	28
CHAPTER III. RESULTS AND EXPLANATION.....	31
CHAPTER IV. RELATIONSHIPS, MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND FRIENDS.....	50
CHAPTER V. BECOMING A SINGLE MOTHER BY CHOICE.....	59
CHAPTER VI. CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS AND SUPPORT.....	75
CHAPTER VII. SUMMARY.....	81
CHAPTER IX. CONCLUSIONS.....	83
CHAPTER X. QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	87
APPENDICES.....	89
Appendix A: Single Mothers by Choice-Philosophy..	89
Appendix B: Cover Letter to Single Mothers by Choice.....	90
Appendix C: Single Parents by Choice Survey.....	90
Appendix D: Answers to Question #26.....	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	119
VITA.....	122

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Age Distribution of Single Mothers by Choice...	32
2. Age of Single Mother by Choice When She Had or Adopted Her First Child.....	34
3. Present Marital Status of Single Mothers by Choice.....	35
4. Previous Marital Status of Single Mothers by Choice When They Had or Adopted Their First Child.....	36
5. Race Distribution of Single Mothers by Choice..	37
6. Educational Level Completed by Single Mothers by Choice.....	38
7. Employment Status of Single Mothers by Choice..	39
8. Occupations of Single Mothers by Choice.....	40
9. Annual Income Earned by Single Mothers by Choice.....	41
10. Present Social Class of Single Mothers by Choice.....	42
11. Parents of Single Mothers by Choice Social Class.....	42
12. Number of Children in the Respondents' Family of Origin.....	45
13. Religious Affiliation of Single Mothers by Choice.....	48
14. Religious Attendance of Single Mothers by Choice.....	49
15. Family Reaction to the News.....	50
16. Friends' Reaction to the News.....	51

LIST OF TABLES  
Continued.

Table	Page
17. Single Mothers by Choice--Reasons for not Marrying.....	57
18. Single Mothers by Choice--Intentions to Marry..	58
19. Number of Children by Choice.....	59
20. Methods of Becoming a Single Mother by Choice..	61
21. Single Mothers by Choice Who Became Pregnant on Purpose.....	63
22. Childcare Providers for Children of Single Mothers by Choice.....	75
23. How Respondents Learned of Becoming a Single Mother by Choice.....	79



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover specific characteristics of women who choose to have children without marriage. The study is exploratory in nature and is heavily descriptive of women who are single mothers by choice.

A questionnaire was mailed to 140 women who belong to a New York based support group named Single Mothers by Choice. The responses from 68 of these questionnaires were used to create the data base.

The woman who chooses to become a single mother by choice is likely to be over thirty years old, white, educated, financially independent, is not religious, and has only one child. She has some support from family and friends and it is likely that she relies on a daycare center for childcare. She would rather be married than single, but there has been no "Mr. Right at the right time" for her. She put a good deal of thought into choosing the father of her child and chose to become pregnant herself rather than choosing donor insemination or adoption.

It is clear that becoming a single mother by choice is a very complicated decision. Every respondent in the study replied that they would make the same decision if they had to live their lives over again. There was not one regret, although the single mothers by choice emphatically agreed that becoming a single mother by choice is not for everyone.

The results suggest that the single mother by choice is financially independent, lives in an urban setting, and has many emotional and educational resources to support her child. It is the philosophy of many of the women that a very stable one-parent home is preferable to an unstable two-parent environment.

SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

A Nontraditional Alternative to Mothering

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the rate of change in the structure of the American family has been marked. Traditionally, we think of the nuclear family as consisting of two parents and about two children, with the father taking the roles of provider and protector, while the mother is the homemaker and in charge of the children. However, Bureau of Census reports indicate that, at any given point in time, the majority of the households in the United States do not represent this form of the family. There has been a slow, but steady increase in the percentage of persons residing in single-parent or dual-career nuclear families, as well as an increase in those living alone or in households comprised of nonrelated individuals (Macklin, 1980). The number of couples who marry, but choose not to have children, is rising as well as the percentage of those who choose never to marry (Veevers, 1980). John and Letha Scanzoni tell us that

Persons seem to fall into four categories when it comes to the matter of children. Traditionally, men and women have considered children as a major reward of marriage and thus have contemplated marriage with "the joys of parenthood" in mind. But in contrast to such couples there are others who feel that the costs of children outnumber the rewards and thus remain voluntarily childless after marriage. A third category consists of single persons who have no desire for either marriage or children since they perceive

the benefits of both to be outweighed by the disadvantages and costs. However, there is a fourth group . . . of single persons who want children, but who don't want marriage.

(Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1980:277-8)

This fourth category of single parents by choice is the subject of this thesis. Adopting the definition provided by the New York City based organization Single Mothers by Choice, "a single mother by choice is a person who DECIDED to have or adopt a child, knowing she would be her child's sole parent, at least at the outset" (Single Mothers by Choice:1985).

"Approximately one out of five children in the United States under the age of 18 now lives in a one-parent family . . . [s]ingle parent famil[ies] are the fastest growing family life-style in America today. Although attitudes are changing slowly, single parent families generally do not enjoy the same status and acceptance in society as do those involved in intact marriages. Social stigmas, stereotyping, exclusion from some resources, and other socially related factors add up to serious complications for many single parents" (Porter, 1981:517-8). Stereotypes against single parents pervade American society. The single parent by divorce, desertion, or death is looked upon with concern. Pity and contempt are often heaped upon the unwed mother

rather than empathy or understanding. Considering the stigma of single parenthood and the frustrations of finding appropriate childcare and domestic aid, why would a single woman choose to have a child? Who are those women who choose to become single mothers by choice?

My thesis seeks to answer these questions. Who is the single mother by choice? What kinds of characteristics do single mothers by choice share? What are the demographic variables of single mothers by choice? How do single women come to the decision to have a child outside marriage, knowing, at least at the beginning, that they will be the child's only parent? Additionally the following questions are of particular interest: Is marriage a possibility for the single mother by choice? What kinds of options were available when they decided to have a child? Would becoming a married parent have interfered too much with career goals or was the "right" mate simply unavailable? Why are children desirable? Finally, what kinds of resources, financial and emotional, does the single mother by choice have? How well equipped is she to raise a child? What kinds of help do single mothers by choice receive and what kinds of social networks do they form for support? Questions dealing with the kind of support provided for their decision are important. What are the reactions and attitudes of their family and friends to their decision

to become a single mother? Do their existing social networks support their decision, or does a new, more supportive social network have to be created?

## CHAPTER I

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### Mother's Licenses

A quick review of illegitimacy statistics reveals that the idea of having children without the benefit of marriage is not new. What is also not new, however, is the suggestion that society should accept and support the person who decides he or she wants children without marriage. As early as 1929, Ruth Reed advocated issuing mother's licenses to those women who desired children, but who did not want a close lifelong association with a man to get them (Reed, 1929:27). She recognized the need for new family forms to accommodate those

numbers of people unwilling to embrace any form of marriage. Many of these people are women who have been unwilling to accept marriage on its present terms, but who have been too prudent to enter into unconventional relationships with men. This course has been followed at great cost to themselves and to society, since they have been deprived of the development which comes from love and motherhood, while society has lost the contribution which they might have made through the bearing of well-nurtured children. Some of these women have desired motherhood without the lifelong association with the other parent which is involved in the present marriage relationship; others have desired love, but without the definite mode of life and activity demanded by

conventional marriage. With the increase in individualism, it is hardly to be hoped that one form of marriage could meet the needs of all human types, and that the recognition of other forms would, therefore, seem to be socially wise.

(Reed, 1929:27)  
Emphasis mine.

Ruth Reed recognized the need for social acceptance of new family forms over fifty years ago. Social acceptance of unmarried parenthood does not appear to have grown to the extent that Reed would have desired.

The problem of the single parent is related to the fact that today sentiment is dominated by the idea of the nuclear family (Schlesinger, 1970). Most people, whether they realize it or not, view the nuclear family in terms of a functionalist point of view. The functionalist view of the family sees the family as an organism with interdependent parts that operate in order to insure the survival of the family. Each part has its own function. Thus, the traditional family organization has essentially adhered to functionalist notions of the structure of the family. The father has been the economic provider and decision maker with his wife, the supportive spouse, mother and homemaker. The children have provided the extra physical labor necessary to run a home, farm, or other family enterprise as well as providers of additional emotional support.



### The Principle of Legitimacy

According to the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1930), there is a universal rule that "no child should be brought into the world without a man -- and one man at that -- assuming the role of sociological father, that is, guardian and protector, the male link between the child and the rest of the community". Malinowski calls this rule the "principle of legitimacy". He claims that throughout cultural variations, "there runs the rule that the father is indispensable for the full sociological status of the child as well as of its mother, that the group consisting of the woman and her offspring is sociologically incomplete and illegitimate. The father, in other words, is necessary for the full legal status of the family".

(Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1981:279)

The idea that the father is essential for the full legal status of the child as well as acting as the link between the child and society pervades the ideal of the American family as well as our legal system (Masnick, 1980; Klein, 1973; Doyle, 1983; Stoll, 1974). "A child is said to require a social father in order that the child receive the status and material benefits that are rightfully his or hers" (Scanzoni, 1980).

This principle of legitimacy, however, may no longer be essential or unavoidable in society today. Two factors have helped to make the legal father, for purposes of legitimacy, less of a necessity. Redefinitions of legitimacy by some countries have simply done away with the distinction between legitimate and nonlegitimate.

Sweden is an example of a country that has abolished the distinction between the two. Reed suggested fifty years ago that the distinction be abolished. She argued that

it was more economical to extend social approval to responsible parents whether inside or outside the marriage relationship, with disapproval of irresponsible parenthood whatever the circumstances in regard to conventional observances. The distinction between illegitimate and illegitimate should be abolished. Every parent who assumes responsibility for the care and nurture of children should be considered a legitimate parent, and every parent who refuses such care should be considered an illegitimate parent without regard for legal or religious formalities.

(Reed, 1929:44)

Most states in the United States have statutes that prohibit the stamp of illegitimacy on birth certificates -- on the grounds that the child is not responsible for the conditions under which it was born. Every child is the legitimate offspring of someone (Personal communication with Dr. R. Wayne Kernodle). The second factor that has diminished the usefulness of the principle of legitimacy is the changing roles of men and women in society (Scanzoni, 1980).

With a higher level of available education, more resources, and increased access to occupational and prestige levels formerly limited only to white men, women, have increasingly found positions that would enable them to assume the status of "legal father". Some ambitious

women who possess the available resources choose to adopt a child or to have one without marriage. The child of this single mother by choice would be provided with the material advantages and status that is rightfully his or hers, as well as access to the opportunity structure and with appropriate socialization. Likewise, single fathers could provide the resources necessary to raise a child outside marriage.

SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE, an organization based in New York City, is founded on the idea that many single women do possess the resources to provide for a child. The group provides support for the woman who feels she has much to offer a child and chooses to raise her child outside marriage. According to the organization's literature, "single motherhood is for the woman who believes she has much to give a child and who has adequate emotional and financial resources to support herself and her child" (Single Mothers by Choice:1985).

This thesis asks the question "WHO is the single mother by choice?" In terms of the principle of legitimacy, it is important to ask whether or not the single parent by choice will be considered a legitimate parent in today's society. Whereas some single parents by virtue of divorce, desertion, or death might be considered perfectly acceptable, social norms may lag behind in accepting the the single parent by choice. It

is the element of choice that presents the problem. R. Emmett Tyrell, Jr., a syndicated columnist, suggests that single parents by choice; in particular, single mothers by choice do not have the right to bring a child into the world knowing that the child will not have a family (ABCNews, 1985). As we have seen, SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE argues that a person who can adequately support a child, financially and emotionally, should be able to become a parent if this is their choice. Much of the philosophy behind SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE and those single parents by choice today rests on the principle of status adequacy.

### The Principle of Status Adequacy

Since Malinowski's "principle of legitimacy" is "not essential or inevitable", Letha and John Scanzoni suggest an "alternative principle of status adequacy". A principle of status adequacy

means that every child requires some sociological parent (father and/or mother) or the equivalent in a communal, kin, or political arrangement that can provide the child with adequate socialization and access to the opportunity system.

(Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1981:281)

The principle of status adequacy views a child as able to have one parent that possesses the resources to connect the child with the community and provide socialization as well as material benefits. Likewise, a parent who fails to meet the requirements of the principle of status adequacy due to lack of education, income, or access to proper socialization or the opportunity is constrained by the principle of status inadequacy.

### Changing Family Functions

The functions of the family have changed over time. "In the agricultural era which preceded the industrial age, the functions performed largely by the family were [several -- reproductive], affectional, economic, recreational, protective, religious, and educational (Rich, 1928:31). Of these functions, only the affectional remains as a bond to hold the family together. The loss of the economic function is evidenced by the changes that have taken place in the workforce over the last two hundred years. Production of goods has shifted from the family as the productive unit to industry. Each member of the family can be employed in different spheres of work and women have not been limited only to the home in domestic and childrearing tasks for decades. Recreation is found outside the home as people become more mobile, more urban, and peers are more easily located. The government has extended itself into the economic, protective, and educational realms. With public schools, the family is not responsible for the total education of its members. Churches and their congregations carry out the religious functions once performed by the family alone.

The affectional tie remains the primary function of the family. Betty Yorburg (1973), in The Changing Family, states this same idea. On the functions of the family, she argues that the family will endure because

the "function of emotional gratification," essentially the affectional bond, cannot be delegated to a bureaucratized institution (Yorburg, 1973:192). The family will persist as an institution because "it is simply not possible to come up with anything more workable to provide for the basic emotional needs of human beings" (Yorburg, 1973:194).

The affectional function of the family is intimately tied to the function of passing on social heritage. Though many other institutions provide socialization experiences for the members of society, the family remains "an instrument for shaping personality in children and an instrument for transmitting the knowledge of the ways of doing things" (Rich, 1928:25).

The passing on of social heritage or socialization and the nurture of children blend together to form the contemporary family's major function. Though the two parts are distinct, they are inseparable. The care and socialization of children does not simply include providing food, clothing, and education for the child. "Instead, real nurture consists in the establishment and growth of ideas, ideals, attitudes, and habit patterns" (Elmer, 1932:88). The emphasis is on the responsibility of the family to teach their children the "knowledge of the ways of doing things" (Rich, 1928:25).

Together with the recognition that the functions of the family have changed and are constantly adapting to changes in the rest of society comes the realization that new family forms should be recognized and sanctioned. New family forms such as the single mother by choice need to be at least recognized, and possibly accepted, in order for the family institution to operate as a viable and strong social unit.



### The Future of the Family

George Masnick and Mary Jo Bane project that there will be quite a few changes in the nature of family households between the years 1975-1990. They project that married couples will make up a smaller proportion of the increase in the total number of households in this time period. The number of total households will increase by 20.2 million; 16.8 million of those will be made up of "unattached individuals". Of this increase of 16.8 million households, 7.0 million will be single or previously married men living alone or with children; 2.6 million will be single or previously married women with children at home, and 7.2 million will be single or previously married women that are not heading families (Masnick, 1980). The number of single women who choose to be without family, at least for the first few years, is expected to rise. The number of female single parents will continue to be large, although the number of male single parents is difficult to predict. From the rise in the number of single parent families, we can expect an increase in the number of single parents by choice among this population.

### Single Parent Statistics

Single parent families make up ten percent of the families in the United States and nineteen percent of the families with children under eighteen (Stein, 1981). Thus, one out of every five children in the United States now lives in a single parent family (Porter, 1981). Single parent families increased by about nine percent from the year 1977 to 1978 -- making single parent families the fastest growing family lifestyle in America today (Porter, 1981; Stein, 1981). "More than ninety percent of these families are maintained by women; five percent are made up of unmarried couples with children present. In 1978, eleven million children were living with their mothers alone, while about one million were living with their fathers alone" (Stein, 1981:275). It is obvious that the majority of single parents are women (Gordon, 1981; Porter, 1981; Stein, 1981), although the percentage of single fathers who choose to have and raise children outside is rising (Stein, 1981; Levine, 1976). Stein also gives us some indication of the varied characteristics of single parents

[t]hey may be separated, divorced, or widowed, or may never have been married at all. They are older than most other singles, and their social lives are curbed by the daily responsibilities of childcare. They may be independent and self-sufficient, but more likely they are overburdened and financially strained. They

are single parents and their number is growing all the time.

(Stein, 1981:275)  
Emphasis mine.

Much of the available literature suggests that the majority of young people consider the parent-role as one they will occupy at some point in their lives (Knaub, 1983; Ross, 1983). Ninety-four point six percent of the women in a study done by Knaub, Eversoll, and Voss expect parenthood to be one of their adult roles (Knaub, et al., 1983). It is interesting to note however, that in a study done by Ross and Kahan "examining inferences made about couples based on their choice of whether or not to have children, . . . female subjects saw having children as enhancing the quality of life of both partners, while males took the opposite view" (Ross, 1983:69). Research done by Veevers (1980) and Yogev and Vierra (1983) shows a growing number of singles and couples who choose to remain childless. The costs of children for these people appear to simply outweigh any possible benefits.

However, it appears that most people who expect to be married also expect to be parents. What about those people who do not desire marriage, but want to be parents? Klein, in The Single Parent Experience gives one explanation. She says it is not so much that they are against marriage, per se, but they are against the

conventional image of marriage as a domineering husband paired with a wife who attains her identity through him. Many single parents, like many "liberated" marrieds, view the marriage relationship as needing room enough for two independent people with varied types of interests. They would probably be married or get married if they met someone with whom they could feel full participation and role sharing. For single parents, when marriage does take place, it will [often] not be in its conventional form (Klein, 1973).

One major change in marriage is that fewer people feel that they need it. Marriage is an institution created by humans. As we change, it will change. Part of the problem is that many of us are changing; our needs, our feelings, our achievements are changing, while attitudes and images of the marital relationship lag behind (Klein, 1973).

### Societal Attitudes Toward the Single Parent Family

Many of the problems of single parents stem from built-in assumptions of the American people about the nature of a family and what constitutes one. Our society is dominated by the idea of the nuclear family. Any kind of "family" that does not consist of father, mother and children deviates somehow from this norm of the nuclear family and is less acceptable and deficient as a family unit. Schlesinger (1970) explains that the number of one parent families in a country is related to the number of illegitimate births in that country. This leads to the peculiar position of the one parent family in society. In cases where social services become involved with single parents of newborns, "most social agencies still work toward the release of the child for adoption, especially if the child is healthy and white. Thus, we overtly admit that the unmarried one-parent family is dysfunctional as a family unit" (Schlesinger, 1970:10).

The marginal status of the single parent family can be illustrated by taking a look at the terms used by the community to refer to them. Terms such as "single parent family", "parents without partners", "only parent", "mother centered home", and "broken home" indicate the devaluation of the single parent as a "real" family unit (Schlesinger, 1970; Porter, 1981). It is usually better to refer to the single parent family as a one-parent family because "it is much less devastating for a child

to be identified as coming from a one-parent family than from a broken home" (Porter, 1981:521). Though Porter obviously has the interests of the child at heart in his article "Family Life Education for Single Parent Families", it is his kind of authorship that promotes the negative myths and stereotypes about single parent families that pervade society. Porter looks at single parent families as those with serious problems and adjustments to make. He sees them as deviant since conformity to the traditional nuclear family model is not possible. Single parent families are only seen from an accident/death/loss point of view since Porter does not even consider the possibility that single parenthood might be a chosen and positive status. Part of the challenge of the single parent family is overcoming the stereotypical images perpetuated by attitudes like those expressed by Porter.

Klein discusses societal attitudes toward the single parent in The Single Parent Experience. She explains that

[w]hile those people who become single parents through death or divorce will share some of the problems faced by those who choose the role, the problems of the single-by-choice parent are in many ways unique. The primary reason for this has already been alluded to: society's attitude toward their decision. Whether they adopt a child or have a natural child, they are inviting their culture's more than casual attention. For the single parent, almost by definition, is separating ideas we have always felt were inseparable.

(Klein, 1973:7)  
Emphasis mine.

"The types of one-parent families might be ranked in the following order of acceptance by society at large: 1. widowed, 2. divorced, 3. separated, 4. unmarried."  
(Klein, 1973:7).

### Societal Attitudes Toward Single Parent Adoption

Some of the stereotypical images that persist in America toward single parenthood can be illustrated by our attitudes toward adoption. James Levine writes about single father ultraplanned parenthood in his chapter on single adoptive parenthood. He reports that

[i]t has not long been possible for a single person to adopt a child. No laws ever prohibited the practice; attitudes did. Single parent families, which as long ago as 1960 represented one out of every eight in America, have been commonly looked on as abnormal -- results of pathology (divorce) or tragedy (parental death), not of choice. So for a child welfare agency to deliberately place a child with a single person was to challenge the sanctity of the two parent family as an American norm.

(Levine, 1976:101)

Adoption by single males is a smaller contributing factor to the incidence of male single parent homes than other factors such as divorce or desertion, but the "single parent father rearing his dependent children can no longer be considered a rare social occurrence" (Smith, 1981:411). One problem is the built in assumption that single parenthood really only means single motherhood. Men who try to adopt without wanting to become husbands as well have a hard time of it. Suspicion of homosexuality almost always accompanies an adoption by a single man, while it is rarely present when a single woman attempts to adopt (Levine, 1976).



The Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions is credited with breaking the first barrier for single parent adoptions. It announced that it would begin cautiously receiving applications from single parents in July, 1965. They placed eight children in "preadoptive placement" in single parent homes within six months of this date and single parent adoption began to be more accepted all over the country (Levine, 1976).

Statistics on single adoptive fathers, like those on home-maker-fathers or men with custody of their children, are hard to come by. The Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions, one of the few public or private agencies in the country to tabulate single parent adoptions--and to break those down by parental sex--reports that from 1965 to March 1975, it placed some 19,134 children, 265 of them with single parents, 14 of whom were men. So, at best, single adoptive fathers still represent a miniscule fraction of all who adopt.

(Levine, 1976:103)

Societal attitudes, stigmas and stereotyping make the single parent family a difficult one to maintain. Problems with adoption procedures and biased agencies make the person who has decided he or she wants to be a single parent question his or her decision at every step of the procedure. Frustration and lack of support seem to face the single parent by choice since our society simply does not successfully provide support or accommodation. Emotional overload is produced by too many responsibilities and tasks without social support to

assist the parent. Judith Gordon explains

[i]t is, after all, not just task and responsibility overload that lead to emotional overload. It is also the strain of living in a society which contains members who insist upon forcing all people into a mold, while ignoring the consequences of poverty, inequality, and the organization of work. To reduce emotional overload, single parents need, as other people do, a society that uses its resources to shape policies based on the recognition of the diversity of human experiences, and the right of all its members, regardless of gender, to have the liberty to pursue happiness in their own way.

(Gordon, 1981:287)

Gordon emphasizes that we must recognize that emotional overload is increased for single parents because we live in an economic and social environment that is hostile to the needs of the single parent. "The effects of this living situation on children and their parent[s] depend greatly on the resources available. Single parents have three major worries and fears [that contribute to overload]: loneliness, children, and money" (Stein, 1981:275).

Social programs and policies that are designed to support single parents could help to offset the kinds of overload they experience. Judith Gordon reports that

[w]e need to develop social policies and programs to alleviate [the] pressures on single parent families. One useful direction is found in the Family Policy Recommendations adopted by the Board of the American Orthopsychiatric Association, (1980). These recommendations suggest that the stability and continuity of all American families, including those

headed by single parents, would be ensured if we agreed that as a society we wanted to provide for full employment and the allocation of resources to develop preventive services and support systems such as visiting housekeepers, day care centers for the young and elderly, income support, flexible working hours for working parents, afterschool programs, and neighborhood programs for adolescents and the old.

(Gordon, 1981:285)

As a society, we are a long way from achieving the consensus necessary to pass such programs even though they may sound ideal. Obstacles to developing blanket policies like the ones just suggested are many, not to mention financial roadblocks.

The impediments to designing an informed and sensitive family policy are threefold. First, Americans always have held nostalgically onto the ideals of the traditional family -- how family ought to be. Second is the sheer inertia built into established institutions. Vested interests are never quick to support changes in any social institutions. In addition to that general mood, those directly charged with developing, implementing, and paying for new public policies are likely to be middle-aged Americans. They are members of that "lucky" generation who came closer than any other to the ideal of American domesticity a nice suburban home; a breadwinner husband and homemaker wife; dedication to childrearing; and status gained from a high level of consumption of housing, automobiles, appliances, and other consumer goods. This generation of adults, now between the ages of forty and sixty, is especially reluctant to validate lifestyles and family forms so different from its own.

The third source of resistance to changes in our households is a genuine lack of understanding of what is happening and why.

(Masnick, 1980:1-2)

With the growth of single parents by choice as an alternative lifestyle, it is important to discover what

kinds of emotional, social and financial support is being provided to these individuals. Until more is learned about who the single parent by choice is and what their needs are, the development of new social programs or the adjustment of existing single parent support programs will be limited. Since a "lack of understanding of what is happening and why" (Masnick, 1980:1-2) is one of the reasons our society appears to be so resistant to change, one of the purposes of this research is to explore what is happening, who it is happening to and why.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

The sampling procedure for this research is aimed at locating single women who have chosen to have children outside marriage. Advertising in national magazines has been used as a device to recruit single mothers by choice with some success (See McCreary: 1979); other alternatives such as a referral system have been considered. For this thesis, I have chosen to deal directly with single mothers by choice through the organization of the same name.

This organization has been extremely helpful to me in obtaining a list of 141 women who belong to their group. These single mothers by choice are members of SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE who have agreed to participate in research activities. SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE has 700 to 1,000 members across the nation, so my sample only represents a small part of their membership. The representativeness of this sample for all single mothers by choice is limited to those members of this particular group SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE who have agreed to participate in research. I feel that this sample is the most optimal one I can collect at this time on this rare

group of women. With a possible referral system, I was hoping (if I were lucky) to obtain two dozen names. With the sample I obtained of 141 names, I was able to gather much more information for the study.

A five page questionnaire with over 30 questions was used to collect the data needed to answer my questions. This questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix C. Appendix B is the cover letter I sent to each single mother by choice requesting her help with my research.

In this questionnaire I have provided a category list for as many questions as possible so that the coding of the responses is efficient. Most of the questions were coded with a simple 1 or 2, for yes or no on SPSSX, or the responses were coded from 1-9, depending on how many responses categories were necessary. In those open ended questions asked, I grouped the responses into categories after the questionnaires were returned to me for coding. The last question provided information that has been especially useful in my descriptive analysis.

My mailing included several parts. The questionnaire, a postcard, a stamped, pre-addressed return envelope, a cover letter, and a manila envelope addressed to the responded to hold the previously listed materials. My sample was numbered consecutively from 101 to 241. These numbers have been assigned to the sample list and appeared on postcards within each mailing

packet. This system was devised to insure anonymity. As each single mother by choice mailed her questionnaire back to me, she also mailed the postcard. The postcard carried their identification number on it and a brief note that simply stated "I have completed your questionnaire on Single Parents by Choice and have mailed it to you". The questionnaire did not have an identification number on it. As I got back the postcards, I was able to check names off my original list, thus reducing the number of names on my second mailing list. The second mailing was a postcard to remind the respondents to return their questionnaires.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESULTS AND EXPLANATION

In May, 1986, one hundred forty-one questionnaires and cover letters were mailed to women who belonged to the New York based operation SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE. Diana Greenwald, one of the organizers of the group provided me with a list of those women who had previously agreed to cooperate with researchers. Seventy-four women returned their questionnaires to me through the mail. (Six additional ones were returned after the information had already been tabulated.) Five additional questionnaires were returned by the United States Post Office as undeliverable. Six questionnaires were not useable since the women who responded had not yet become mothers and one woman had been married when each of her children had been born. Thus, 68 of the 141 questionnaires mailed out were used to establish the data base, reflecting a 48% return rate.

The data base is comprised of 79 variables resulting from the questionnaires and coding. The presentation of the results that follows will discuss each variable separately and the question on the questionnaire as well as those combinations of variables that are important.



## Sample Characteristics

### Age

The respondents varied in age from 23 to 47 years old. Only 5 of the women were under 30, which left more than 90 percent of the sample over 30 years old. Twenty four women were clustered at the 39 to 41 range, representing over 35 percent of the respondents. The table below provides the frequency of each age along with the percentage of the sample represented at each age level.

TABLE 1

#### AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Age</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
23	1	1.5
25	1	1.5
26	2	2.9
29	1	1.5
30	2	2.9
31	5	7.4
32	3	4.4
33	3	4.4
34	4	5.9
35	6	8.8
36	2	2.9
37	3	4.4
38	4	5.9
39	8	11.8
40	8	11.8
41	8	11.8
42	2	2.9
43	3	4.4
44	1	1.5
47	1	1.5
Total	68	100.0%

Age is the most critical factor for many of the women who make the decision to become a single mother by choice. As women approach the magic number "30" in years, many of them feel that their "biological clock" is ticking even louder and essentially their bodies are running out of the time necessary to have children.

Almost every respondent that made additional written comments about their decision at the end of the questionnaire included some reference to their age. Some of the women wrote:

A strong desire to parent was becoming paramount by age 31.

I had just turned 28 and was somewhat worried about time factors.

When I was divorced at age 27 (with no children) I made up my mind that if I hadn't found the man for me by my mid-thirties, I'd simply proceed with my lifelong intention of becoming a parent through less traditional means.

[A child] was something I wanted desperately from the age of 32.

The proverbial 'clock was running out'!

The ages of the respondents when they had or adopted their first child is also important. The women's ages when they got their first child fell within seven years of their present ages. About 9 percent of the sample was under 25 years old, while over 70 percent were over 30. The table on the next page reflects the age of the single mothers by choice when they had or adopted their first child.

TABLE 2

AGE OF SINGLE MOTHER BY CHOICE WHEN SHE  
HAD OR ADOPTED HER FIRST CHILD

<u>Age</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
17	1	1.5
20	1	1.5
21	1	1.5
22	1	1.5
25	2	2.9
26	1	1.5
28	3	4.4
29	6	8.8
30	2	2.9
31	5	7.4
32	4	5.9
33	4	5.9
34	5	7.4
35	5	7.4
36	8	11.8
37	8	11.8
38	6	8.8
39	2	2.9
40	2	2.9
<u>No response-</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
Total	68	100.0%

### Marital Status

To indicate marital status, respondents had to choose from 5 categories: single, married, divorced, separated, and deserted. The respondents were asked to indicate their present marital status as well as their marital status at the time of their first child's birth or adoption. None of the women were deserted, while one wrote in widowed as her category. Fifty-seven point four of the women are presently single while 61.8 percent were single when they had their first child. Since 7.4 percent are presently married, this represents an increase of nearly 5 percent over those married at the time they had or adopted their first child. A little over 30 percent of the single mothers by choice were and are presently divorced.

TABLE 3

#### PRESENT MARITAL STATUS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Single	39	57.4
Married	5	7.4
Divorced	22	32.4
Separated	1	1.5
Widowed	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%

TABLE 4

PREVIOUS MARITAL STATUS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE  
WHEN THEY HAD OR ADOPTED THEIR FIRST CHILD

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Single	42	61.8
Married	2	2.9
Divorced	21	30.9
Separated	2	2.9
Widowed	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%

Race

The overwhelming majority of the respondents checked the "White" response when filling out this portion of the questionnaire. Fifty-eight of the 68 respondents, or 85.3 percent were white. This is proportional to the number of white women in the American population. Black women, however, are extremely under-represented in the sample. Only 2 of the 68 respondents were Black, 4 were Hispanic, and 1 was an American Indian/Alaskan Native.

TABLE 5

## RACE DISTRIBUTION OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Race</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Hispanic	4	5.9
Black	3	4.4
Other	2	2.9
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	1	1.5
White	<u>58</u>	<u>85.3%</u>
	68	100.0%

### Education

From the earliest formulation of the thesis problem, education was considered to be critical to the decision to become a single mother by choice since it is so closely related to the kind of job the single mother has, her income and her career. It is an important indicator of the resources the single mother by choice has at her disposal.

Over 40 percent of the respondents in the sample completed graduate school. This is in keeping with the idea that the single mother by choice is a professional woman with a solid resource base with which to raise a child. Seventy-two percent of the women finished a four-year college or more. All of the respondents had at least some college education.

TABLE 6

#### EDUCATIONAL LEVEL COMPLETED BY SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Educational Level</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Some College	12	17.6
2-yr. College	5	7.4
Technical/Business	2	2.9
4-yr. College	11	16.2
Some Graduate School	10	14.7
Completed Graduate School	<u>28</u>	<u>41.2</u>
	68	100.0%

Employment Status

The majority of the respondents maintain full or part-time employment. Sixty-four of the 68 respondents reported either part-time or full-time employment (including self-employment, full and part-time). Two respondents were students, and one woman was unemployed.

TABLE 7

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Employment Status</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Employed, part-time	11	16.2
Employed, full-time	43	63.2
Self-Employed, part-time	6	8.8
Self-Employed full-time	4	5.9
Student	2	2.9
Unemployed	1	1.5
No Response	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%



### Occupation

The women in the sample are spread out over many occupational fields. The field of education dominated the occupational categories with 17.6% of the sample falling into this category. Business/Administration followed with 14.7% of the responses coded. Thirteen point two percent of the cases were missing, while the Psychology/Counseling category included 10.3% of the responses. Most of the women felt that their work was a career rather than a job, with more than 55 percent answering that their work was a career for them.

TABLE 8

## OCCUPATIONS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Social Work	4	5.9
Education	12	17.6
Law	6	8.8
Journalism-Broadcasting	4	5.9
Psychology-Counseling	7	10.3
Nursing-Medical Technology	6	8.8
Computer		
Consulting-Programming	3	4.4
Business-Administration	10	14.7
Clerical-Secretarial	7	10.3
No Response	9	13.2
	<u>68</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

Income

The \$25,000 to \$34,999 category had the largest number of responses checked, with 18 of the 68 women reporting this annual income. Only three single mothers by choice reported an annual income of less than \$5,000. Sixteen point two percent reported an annual income of \$5,000 to \$14,999. Sixteen women reported that they earned an income of \$15,000 to \$24,999 per year, making this category the second largest income group. Over one fourth of the sample reported earning over \$35,000 per year. Only one woman failed to answer the question.

TABLE 9

## ANNUAL INCOME EARNED BY SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Annual Income</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Below \$5,000/yr.	3	4.4
\$5,000-\$14,999/yr.	11	16.2
\$15,000-\$24,999/yr.	16	23.5
\$25,000-\$34,999/yr.	18	26.5
\$35,000-\$44,999/yr.	7	10.3
\$45,000-\$54,999/yr.	5	7.4
Over \$55,000/yr.	7	10.3
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%

Social Class

Most of the respondents felt that their social class position was the same as their parents. The data are listed in Table 10 and Table 11.

TABLE 10

## PRESENT SOCIAL CLASS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Social Class</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Upper Middle Class	15	22.1
Middle Class	36	52.9
Lower Middle Class	10	14.7
Working Class	3	4.4
Lower Class	3	4.4
No Response	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%

TABLE 11

## PARENTS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE SOCIAL CLASS

<u>Social Class</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Upper Middle Class	18	26.5
Middle Class	31	45.6
Lower Middle Class	13	19.1
Working Class	5	7.4
No Response	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%

## Geographical Locations

### Present vs. Childhood Residence Area and Population

Most of the survey sample women presently live in a city with a population over 50,000--58.8 percent of the single mothers by choice live in a city and 26.5 percent live in a suburban area. Forty-eight of the respondents, or 70.6 percent of the sample lives in an area with a population over 50,000 people. The remaining statistics were of minimal importance.

It appears that urban and suburban areas with substantial populations are more popular with the woman who decided to become single mothers by choice. It may be that there are more support groups, greater employment opportunities and simply a more open-minded public in a suburban or urban area than in a rural or small town environment.

The primary difference for the single mothers by choice in the present residence area and their childhood residence area is a gradual move from suburban areas in their childhood to more urban/city areas in their present residence area. There is a slight shift from suburban and small town areas as childhood residence areas to more urban city areas as adults. Over 38 percent of the respondents reported living in a suburban area as a child compared to 26.5 percent presently living in a suburban area. Thirty-nine point seven percent reported living in a city area as a child compared to 58.8 percent living

presently in a city area. Almost half said they had lived in an area with a population over 50,000 when they were children compared to over 70 percent presently living in an area with over 50,000 people.

Number of Children in the Respondent's Family of Origin

A factor that might have a bearing on the decision to have a child would be the number of children in one's family of origin. Someone trying to make the decision to have a child would be influenced by their own experiences as a child. The number of children in the respondents' family of origin ranged from being the only child to having up to seven children within one family. Most single mothers by choice came from a family with two or three children--30.9 percent reported two children in their families, 35.3 percent said they had three children in their families, and only 13.2 percent reported that they were the only child. One-fifth of the sample came from a family with four or more children.

The number of children in the respondents' family of origin is given in Table 12. It is clear that most of the single mothers by choice (nearly 90 percent) came from families where they had at least one sibling.

TABLE 12

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE RESPONDENTS' FAMILY OF ORIGIN

<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1	9	13.2
2	21	30.9
3	24	35.3
4	9	13.2
5	3	4.4
6	1	1.5
7	1	1.5
	<u>68</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

### Status at Birth

Since most of the children produced by single mothers by choice are considered illegitimate by society, I thought that illegitimacy would be an influential factor on the single mother by choice.

Initially, I thought that the question on illegitimacy could yield a wealth of information if several of the respondents were illegitimate themselves or if they came from families where illegitimacy was common or at least, accepted. The statistics on the question were quite surprising. Only one respondent reported that she herself was illegitimate. Her feelings about this were indifferent. Another reported that she had one illegitimate sibling. Thus, illegitimacy or acceptance of it, or even familiarity with it does not appear to play a role in the decision to have a child outside marriage.

Most of the concerns the women had stemmed from an absent father rather than from an illegitimate child. Several of the women expressed relief in not having to deal with a father/husband constantly and the freedom to raise their child without having to discuss every detail with the father of the child. This freedom to make all the decisions concerning the child was viewed as a freedom on the one hand and a burden on the other. Since choosing single parenthood REQUIRES making all the decisions; it is not always a positive experience,

although the general consensus is "I would do it again."

Concern for the child and how he or she would cope throughout life without a father was a more prominent concern than problems dealing with socially defined "illegitimacy". Single mothers by choice worry that their children will have trouble adjusting later in life due to the absence of a father, but as one woman put it:

At the same time, the fact that he did live in another state appealed to me. I wouldn't have his interference. An absolutely absent father relationship is better than an unstable one. You can't miss something you never had.

The premise for many of the respondents on "You can't miss something you have never had" is that one stable parent is better than two parents who are unstable, separated, or fighting. Since the single mother by choice decided to have her child alone, the child will be secure in the knowledge that he or she was indeed a wanted child. One respondent said that her baby meant a lot to her because she knew that she would be a better single parent than many parents who are married.



Religious Affiliation, and Attendance

A disproportionate number of the survey women considered themselves to be Jewish--30.9% of them checked the Jewish category when asked the question "What is your religious affiliation?" The second largest category chosen was None or No Response--26.5% of the responses listed none as their religious affiliation or gave no response to the question at all. Only 14.7% chose Catholic as their religious affiliation. The remaining responses were divided up among six other categories: Presbyterian, Quaker/Mormon, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Unitarian.

TABLE 13

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Religious Affiliation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Jewish	21	30.9
Catholic	10	14.7
Presbyterian	3	4.4
Quaker/Mormon	2	2.9
Episcopalian	3	4.4
Methodist	4	5.9
Lutheran	3	4.4
Unitarian	4	5.9
None	10	14.7
No Response	<u>8</u>	<u>11.8</u>
	68	100.0%

Two-thirds of the women in the study did not consider themselves religious. These women checked the NO box under this question. The high number of women who did not consider themselves religious is in keeping with the high number of None/No Responses checked in the first question on religion. It is also consistent with the low religious attendance figures in the next question. Women who choose to have a child without choosing marriage have basic philosophical differences with many churches who would prefer they were married. However, one thing we can learn from the statistics is that, as a group, Single Mothers by Choice shy away from religious activities, on the whole do not consider themselves religious, and attend church services seldomly, if ever.

Almost 80% of the women responded that they attended religious services either seldom or never. Nearly half responded that they seldom attended, while 33.8% said they never attended services. There were two missing cases.

TABLE 14

## RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Religious Attendance</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Always	5	7.4
Often	7	10.3
Seldom	31	45.6
Never	23	33.8
No Response	<u>2</u>	<u>2.9</u>
	68	100.0%

CHAPTER IV  
RELATIONSHIPS, MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Reaction of Family and Friends

The family's reaction to the news that their daughter or sister was becoming a single mother by choice was divided. Half of the respondents reported that their family was favorable/supportive of their decision before the child was became theirs. Only two women said their family was indifferent to their decision--2.9% of the sample. Over one-fourth of the sample reported that their family was unfavorable or unsupportive of their decision before the child became theirs. Ten percent of the sample said their family did not know of their decision to have a child outside marriage before their child became theirs.

TABLE 15  
FAMILY REACTION TO THE NEWS

<u>Family Reaction to News</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Favorable/supportive	34	50.0
Indifferent	2	2.9
Unfavorable/unsupportive	18	26.5
Did not know about it	7	10.3
No Response	<u>7</u>	<u>10.3</u>
	68	100.0%

Friends of the single mother by choice appeared to be much more supportive than family before the child became the single mothers'. Three-fourths of the respondents said their friends reacted favorably to the news that they were going to have a child outside marriage before the child became theirs. Ten percent checked the indifferent/didn't care one way or another category, while only 4.4 percent said their friends were unfavorable or unsupportive in their reaction to the news. Only one woman responded that her friends did not know about her decision.

TABLE 16  
FRIENDS' REACTION TO THE NEWS

<u>Friends' Reaction to News</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Favorable/supportive	51	75.0
Indifferent	7	10.3
Unfavorable/unsupportive	3	4.4
Did not know about it	1	1.5
No Response	<u>6</u>	<u>8.8</u>
	68	100.0%

Whereas the families' general reaction to the news that their daughter/sister/cousin, etc. was going to become a mother without marriage was divided 50/50, the friends' reactions to the news were generally more favorable. It must be pointed out that many of the family members "came around" after the single mother by choice got/had/adopted her child. Though they may have

had reservations about the idea at first, many changed their minds when the child actually arrived and became a part of their lives. It is quite obvious that the women in the study need and require the support and comfort provided by their social networks. If support and assistance are not available from their families, their friends and neighbors become even more crucial. Family and friends influence the single mother a great deal. When a woman makes the decision to become a single mother by choice, it is with a good deal of thought and more than a few reservations for most. Family and friends have an overwhelming impact on the emotional outlook and perspective of the single mother. Some of the women explain this and other details about the feelings of family and friends in their additional comments at the end of the questionnaire.

The family and to a lesser extent, friends have not been supportive until the rights of my son's birth parents were terminated. Now that he has been adopted he has been accepted. But I still find that it is not permissible (to them) to complain about difficulties as I chose this situation and must live with it.

I became a single parent by choice because I knew that my parents were willing to help me reach my goals. Through their generosity, I've been able to stay home with my child for her first two years.

My mother has moved in with me to help care for the babies. Our relationship has improved 200% as we both know how much we need each other.

The only reason I could think of for terminating my pregnancy was the fear of what people would say. When I terminated my previous pregnancy, I rationalized that an unmarried pregnancy would hurt my parents too much. This time, I realized that I had to do what I felt was right for me. My parents accepted the situation quite well. My baby would be their 11th grandchild and they really were grateful that everyone in the family was healthy and happy.

My pregnancy was very good, exciting, and pleasurable, with notable exceptions: my family's reaction--my mother being the most negative, suggesting that I would have a retarded child, etc; the unstated responses of co-workers (which it turned out were unfounded); . . . .

### Marriage

Women that choose to become single mothers by choice have their own unique set of feelings about marriage in general and toward their past marital opportunities. Though it is impossible to totally generalize all the respondents' opinions, we do know from this study two recurring themes on the subject. Women that choose this alternative lifestyle repeatedly state that:

I wanted to be a mother and there was no "Mr. Right" in sight. Though it would be nice to have "Mr. Right" and a baby, you don't have to have him to have the baby. I decided to do it alone.

Time was running out. I always knew if I wasn't married by my mid-to-late thirties, I would go on and have a child on my own.

These two basic ideas repeat themselves over and over throughout the study, in the respondents' comments, and in their explanations at the end of the questionnaire. Single mothers by choice have this basic philosophy. Though most would like to be married, and have a family--they do not have to have a husband to have a baby. The second factor in their decision is the "biological clock". They might have more time later in life to find "Mr. Right", but they are running out of the time they need to physically bear their own child. Most of the women in the study found the idea that they might never become a mother impossible to bear.

### Opportunities to Marry and/or Become a Parent

Most of the women who answered the questionnaire had the opportunity to marry at least once in their lives. Fifty of the 68 respondents answered YES to the question "Did you ever have the opportunity to marry?" Fifteen respondents answered no to the question. There were three missing cases. Nearly three-quarters of the sample had the opportunity to marry, while most of the remainder reported that they had not had this opportunity.

This topic is a difficult one to discuss since twenty-five percent of the respondents did not answer the question. The question was part two of a set of questions on marriage, opportunities to parent, and reasons for not marrying. After the respondent was asked "Did you ever have the opportunity to marry?", she was asked "If YES, could you have become a married parent?". More than half responded that yes, they could have become a married parent; 17.6 percent replied that they could not have become a married parent, and one person gave an answer that did not fit any of these categories.

It appears that more than half of the sample could have been married and could have been a married parent. On the other hand, it is a difficult question to answer for the single mother by choice, since it is difficult to know what one COULD have done.



Reasons Not to Marry

Reasons not to marry were covered in the third part of this set of questions on marriage. The third question in this set read: "If you could have married and had a child(ren), why did you choose not to marry?" This was an open ended question with opportunity for the single mother by choice to answer in the space provided. The responses were grouped by the following categories during coding.

- 1-Respondent was not ready at the time opportunity arose.
- 2-Respondent feels she is too old to get married.
- 3-The marriage partner available was unsuitable
- 4-The single mother by choice has been married, is now divorced.
- 5-Respondent does not want to be married.
- 6-Respondent did not love partner presented.
- 7-No Mr. Right available at the right time.
- 8-Mr. Right was already married.
- 9-Planned on marriage, relationship soured.
- 10-No response.

The responses for this question were difficult to code and put into categories. Most of the women elaborated at length on this question with very personal reasons for not marrying. The short descriptions of their reasons given above does not really do justice to their responses.

Reasons for not marrying scattered over the entire range of responses given on the preceding page. Thirty percent of the sample did not answer the question; there were 20 missing cases. "Not ready" was the most popular reason for not marrying when the opportunity was presented; 23.5% of the sample gave this reason. "No Mr. Right at the right time" was the second most cited reason for not marrying with 14.7% of the sample listing this as their reason for not marrying. It is interesting to note that although many of the single mothers by choice discussed their "biological clock" as one of the reasons for their decision to have a child outside marriage, only one respondent listed "being too old" as a reason for NOT marrying. Being older is a barrier for physically becoming a mother, but not as rule, a barrier for marriage and intimate relationships. All of the responses are listed below.

TABLE 17

## SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE--REASONS FOR NOT MARRYING

<u>Reason for not marrying</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Not ready at the time	16	23.5
Respondent too old	1	1.5
Partner avail. unsuitable	7	10.3
Been married, now divorced	8	11.8
Does not want marriage	2	2.9
Does not love partner	2	2.9
No Mr. Right	10	14.7
He was married	1	1.5
Planned on marriage, didn't work out	1	1.5
No Response	<u>20</u>	<u>29.4</u>
	68	100.0%

### Intentions to Marry

Whatever reasons single mothers by choice give for not marrying before they became single mothers, the majority of them do intend to marry "one day". Nearly sixty percent the sample answered YES to the question "Do you ever intend to marry?". Forty of the 68 respondents do intend to marry someday. Only 10 of the 68 respondents, or 14.7 percent said NO to the question. Six of the women are married now, though they were not when they became single mothers by choice. About three percent are undecided and one respondent answered "If possible!".

TABLE 18

#### SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE--INTENTIONS TO MARRY

<u>Intentions to Marry</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
YES	40	58.8
NO	10	14.7
Married Now	6	8.8
Undecided	2	2.9
If Possible	1	1.5
No Response	9	13.3
	<u>68</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

CHAPTER V  
BECOMING A SINGLE MOTHER BY CHOICE

Some of the single mothers by choice had more than one child outside marriage. Four of the respondents had two children and two women had three. About ninety percent of the sample, or 61 of the 68 respondents only have one child outside marriage.

TABLE 19  
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY CHOICE

<u>Number of children By Choice</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1	61	89.7
2	4	5.9
3	2	2.9
0	<u>1</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	68	100.0%

### Methods of Becoming a Single Mother by Choice

There are three fundamental methods of becoming a single mother by choice: The woman's own pregnancy, adoption, or donor insemination. Adoption would involve adopting a child through either public or private means. The woman's own pregnancy would involve the woman locating a willing partner to father the child; finding a friend, stranger, or lover, etc. Donor insemination would also involve the woman's own pregnancy, but it is particularly important to put donor insemination in its' own category, since the single mother does not have physical contact with the donor and does not personally know the father of her child. In some cases, the single mother may learn some of the physical characteristics of the donor, or even specify them before her doctor chooses the donor. Genetic qualities are sometimes specified as well as mental ones.

The overwhelming majority of the single mothers by choice responded that they became single mothers by choice through their own pregnancy. Again, there were some problems with this question in terms of coding. If both donor insemination and your own pregnancy were checked by the respondent, then the question was coded as donor insemination, in order to separate out this category.

Three-fourths of the sample responded that they became single mothers by choice through their own pregnancy. This represented 50 of the 68 respondents. Eleven of the 68, or 16.2 percent said that they adopted their children.

Seven of the 68, or 10.3 percent checked the box for donor insemination.

TABLE 20

## METHODS OF BECOMING A SINGLE MOTHER BY CHOICE

<u>Method</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Own pregnancy	50	73.5
Adoption	11	16.2
Donor insemination	<u>7</u>	<u>10.3</u>
	68	100.0%

Pregnant on Purpose?

For those who became single mothers by choice through their own pregnancy, there were two types: Those that got pregnant on purpose (who knew from the start that they wanted to become single mothers by choice), and those who got pregnant and then made the decision to have the child. Initially, I felt that those women who had become pregnant accidentally or for other reasons would not fit my sample of "Single Mothers by Choice" since they did not decide they wanted to become single mothers by choice before they became pregnant. However, after much thought, I included them in my sample since they have consciously made a CHOICE, to keep their children and become single mothers by choice. That their choice was made under more forced circumstances does not make it any less difficult, or them any less a single mother by choice.

Table 21 displays the responses for the question "Did you purposely become pregnant?" As you can see, 55.9 percent of the sample did become pregnant on purpose. Over twenty percent responded that NO, they did not become pregnant on purpose. Sixteen of the 68 respondents did not answer the question. These missing cases represent those women who adopted and some others who simply failed to answer the question (possibly some of those who were donor inseminated).

TABLE 21

SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE WHO BECAME PREGNANT ON PURPOSE

<u>Pregnant on Purpose?</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
YES	38	55.9
NO	14	20.6
No Response	<u>16</u>	<u>23.5</u>
	68	100.0%



Reason for Pregnancy

As noted earlier, the majority of the women became pregnant on purpose, over 50 percent. These women responded to "If YES, did you become pregnant because you wanted a child? Of those who responded, 92.9 percent said YES to the question. Two women checked the NO box, and one woman said she did not know her reason for becoming pregnant. Of the entire sample, there were 26 missing cases for this question.

There were 61 missing cases for the question "If NO, what was your reason for becoming pregnant?". Seven women responded to the question, six said they had a subconscious desire for a child and one cited failure of birth control as her reason for a child.

Eighteen of the women in the sample responded to the next question "If NO, did you make the decision to become a single parent AFTER you became pregnant? There were fifty missing cases. Sixteen of the respondents said YES, they made the decision to become single mothers by choice AFTER they discovered their pregnancies. Two checked the NO box. Their reasons for deciding to become single mothers by choice varied since they made the decision after they had already learned of their pregnancies:

Finally realized the unlikelihood of being in a stable, healthy, male-female relationship was minimal, and wanted a child regardless of singlehood, especially considering my age.

The night before I went for my test I had an incredible dream of empowerment and I think it was that dream that gave me the strength to go through the pregnancy alone.

Wanted a family, to be a parent, even though marriage was not coming my way.

Was at age 31, no prospect of marriage, also felt baby's father had good background for a good baby and I loved him much.

I was age 33 and wanted very much to be a mother. I was financially able to do it alone.

Because I wanted a child, but didn't feel a marriage to the child's father would have been good for any of us.

My child's father refused to stand by me as earlier promised.

No other decision I felt I could make.

I was 34, biological clock ticking louder, tired of waiting for "Mr. Right", wanted a baby for a few years, had never been pregnant, feared this might be my only chance.

I didn't plan on going through with the pregnancy, but I really wanted to have the baby even though I was not getting any emotional support from my family.

### Choosing the Father

The majority of the single mothers by choice put some thought into choosing the father of their child. When asked "Did you choose the father of your child?" [] yes [] no, 54.4 percent answered YES. Over twenty percent of the respondents said no, and sixteen respondents did not answer the question. Most of these missing cases represented those women who adopted or chose donor insemination methods for having their children.

There were many reasons and explanations for choosing the fathers of their children. "If YES, how did you go about choosing the father?" was the open-ended question that followed "Did you choose the father of your child?". The responses varied over several topics; genetics, looks, family background, education, love and on-going relationships. Some examples include:

He was my lover during the last nine years.

He was someone I was involved with, he was so-called good father material, and was amenable to having a child with me.

We met and I made a quick decision.

We met and dated a couple of years.

He had traits (physical and mental) that I want in my child.

Someone I loved, he was married. Best candidate of three; smart, sensitive, handsome, inventive.

An old and dear friend, former lover, who I had cared for and respected for 15+ years.

He was someone I felt wouldn't cause difficulties. He was very bright and attractive.

[He was a] healthy, respectable, intelligent friend.

I chose a friend of many years who agreed to help me get pregnant and agreed to my terms. We have a signed contract between us, stating terms.

Height, body-build, general health, temperament, family background, stable, working-class, semi-religious.

The single mothers by choice appear to desire several characteristics in choosing the father for their child. Good health, intelligence, and physical attractiveness top the list of required attributes. Also involved in the decision seemed to be some kind of personal relationship in many cases. Some of the women chose lovers, dates, or very good friends. A couple chose men they felt were of good "genetic stock and intelligence", but their primary appeal was in that they [the fathers] wouldn't cause difficulties by trying to claim the child at a later date. So convenience and proximity were also decisive factors in choosing fathers.

### Father's Knowledge of the Child

An important question in studying single mothers by choice is the extent of the fathers' knowledge of the child and his involvement in their lives. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents who answered the question replied YES, that the father of their child did know of the child's existence. About twelve percent checked the NO box, 1 response could not be coded and there were 16 No responses or missing cases. In other words, 43 of the 68 respondents said the fathers of their children were aware of the children, while 8 of the women said the fathers were not aware that their children existed.

After learning whether or not the father knew about the child, three additional questions were asked concerning the father's involvement in their lives and the mother's feelings concerning the father.

Twenty percent answered YES to the first question, saying the father of their child is involved or would like to be involved in his child's life. Twenty-eight women, or 41.2 percent said the fathers were not involved in their child's life. Twenty-six respondents, or 38.3 percent were missing cases.

Only 19 respondents even answered the second question about father involvement. Forty-nine women did not answer the question, leaving an equal number of missing cases. Of the 19 that did respond, 7 said the father was financially

involved, while 6 said the father provided emotional support. Four respondents said the father would like to be involved, but this is not possible, and 2 said the father was minimally involved.

Does/Did the Single Mother by Choice Love the Father of Her Child?

Earlier in the discussion about choosing the father of the child, a love relationship was listed as one of the possible requirements for this choice. In response to the questions "Did you love the father of your child PRIOR to your pregnancy?" and "Do you love him now?", there were 26 missing cases. Nearly half of the sample answered YES to the first question, while only 22.1 percent answered yes to the second question. The NO responses increased from 13.2 percent in the first question to 39.7 percent in the second. It is obvious that while 33 of the respondents loved the father of their child prior to their pregnancy, only 15 still love him now. At the same time, 9 women answered that they did not love the father of their child prior to their pregnancy. This number increased to 27 respondents answering they do not love the father of their child now.

From the answers to these questions and comments from the women in the study, you can see that many of these women were in love relationships before they decided to have a child. While some still are involved in love relationships with the father of their child, many have "fallen out of love" with the father of their child, due to their decision to become single mothers or for other reasons. Some of the women elaborated on their

emotional states before and after they became single mothers:

I didn't want to marry my daughter's father or any of the other men I had had in my life because I knew that I'd have 2 kids (one being them) instead of only one.

When I became pregnant, it was not hard for me to make a choice about keeping the baby; I felt I needed the baby to keep a part of Mark's and my relationship with me, having invested so many years in the relationship. I did not know, of course, that Mark would stick around this long; I hoped he would, but was not sure. Our relationship is now as parents and best friends, with the realization that our son will be better off with our relationship this way.

I love my son and would do it the same way again, only this time I would have left his father a lot sooner, had I realized that I didn't need him.

I had a relationship with [my daughter's] father, but it had gone from quite intense to being a very casual thing. Even though I cared about him very much, I knew from the beginning that I was on my own.

I am still friends, but not romantically involved with the child's father.

My lover and I were not yet ready to commit to marriage, although we have since married.



## Adoption

Eleven women responded to the question on adoption. Four women adopted their children through a private agency, one through a public agency, and six through other means. Other means included private lawyers, personal friends, and doctor referrals.

The women who adopted their children, rather than physically bearing them had very specific reasons for adoption. Some felt that adoption proved to require more from them in terms of a challenge. Others simply could not become pregnant by traditional means. They elaborated on these reasons on the last page of their questionnaires:

I wanted a child that need me as much as I could give. A birthchild would be welcome--but would not offer the challenge I asked. A foreign adoption I did (do) not believe in as I feel there is not guarantee that you are not in reality buying a baby-(stolen or conceived for cash). I wanted a child whose life would be changed for the better and I would be unique in my ability to do so. So through a public adoption agency, I first fostered, then adopted my beautiful little boy. He has Down Syndrome, is of mixed black/hispanic/white heritage, the second child of a single 17 year-old.

Became pregnant by accident at the age of 36--knew I had always wanted marriage and children--10 wks. finally made the decision to keep after joining Single Mothers By Choice. Lost baby at 26 weeks. After loss, was totally determined to have a child and adopted one year later!

I tried intercourse with boyfriends, artificial insemination, and finally, when nothing happened, I decided I couldn't wait any longer and began adoption work. It took 2 years to adopt--finding the source and finally getting a newborn.

After a year of trying with a consenting boyfriend and AID, I proved infertile. By that time, my desire to have a child was at such a fever pitch and my commitment so profound that I adopted.

After 4 unsuccessful pregnancies in 4 years of marriage, I built a new life as a single woman, but never gave up the idea of motherhood. At the age of 35, I decided to adopt, while in the process of international adoption, a soon-to-be-born child became available through a physician friend. My son was given over to me at the age of two days.

### Donor Insemination

One choice available to the woman who wants to become a single mother by choice is donor insemination. Donor insemination has its own particular benefits as described by two single mothers by choice:

At first, I researched the pros and cons of insemination vs. adoption. Becoming pregnant through a partner is not morally sound for me. I have no difficulty with insemination.

I chose artificial insemination because there would be no legal problems, the donor would be intelligent and healthy, and it was a socially acceptable alternative for my family.

For these women, donor insemination is a more morally sound and socially acceptable alternative for getting pregnant. Other women worried that their children would resent having a "donor" for a father, since it is nearly impossible to locate the "donor". This is seen as a benefit to some single mothers by choice. The anonymity of the father is viewed as positive because the "father" will not know of the child and cannot cause problems by laying claim to the child at a later date.

There were 9 women in the study who chose donor insemination. This constitutes 13.2 percent of the sample. No inseminations took place at home or in a fertility clinic. Of the 9 women who responded to the question, 2 were inseminated at a hospital and 7 were inseminated at a doctor's office.

CHAPTER VI  
CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS AND SUPPORT

An overwhelming 89.7 percent of the single mothers by choice reported that they had others care for their child.

TABLE 22  
CHILDCARE PROVIDERS FOR CHILDREN  
SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

<u>Childcare provided by</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Own parents	11	16.2%
Other family members	2	2.9%
Others	27	39.7%
Friends	11	16.2%
Daycare facilities	<u>30</u>	<u>44.1%</u>
	81	119.1%

As you can see from the chart above daycare facilities and others rank the highest in providing childcare. Most single mothers by choice use some combination of these sources for childcare. Looking at the frequency and percent totals, you can see that many women checked more than one category for the question.

Providing childcare appears to be equally shared by friends and family, both providing childcare to 16.2

percent of the women in the sample. Daycare facilities provide 44.1 percent of the single mothers with childcare, and others provide 39.7 percent. Others include live-in housekeepers, paid babysitters, and childcare in private homes.

### Financial Help

Although most single parents need financial help, only 38.2 percent of the single mothers by choice reported that they received financial help from others; 61.8 percent reported that they receive no financial help from others. This high percentage of single mothers by choice that does not require additional financial assistance reflects the resource level of the single mother by choice. One of the reasons many single women decide to become single mothers by choice is that they already possess the financial resources to support themselves and their children without the help of a husband.

Of those that do receive monetary help, 10.3 percent report that their parents provide financial help; 2.9 percent report that other family members assist them; 2.9 percent report that their monetary assistance comes from a social agency; 10.3 percent indicate that their financial help comes from other sources, while 22.1 percent say they receive money from the father of their child; and 7.4 percent said they received help from Aid to Dependent Children. Only 1 respondent said that friends provide financial assistance.

Other needs

More than half of the respondents said they have other needs to be met. One person did not answer the question. Other needs included money, emotional support, love, affection, significant relationships, childcare, sharing domestic tasks, respite, and a role model for the child.

One-fourth of the respondents said their other needs were met, while 17.6 percent said their other needs were not met. More than half did not answer the question. Twenty-five of the respondents replied that their parents help to meet these other needs. This figure represents 36.8 percent of the sample. Fifteen said that other family members meet these needs. Two replied that an agency meets these needs, while eight checked the box marked "other". Only three respondents indicated that the father of the child meets these other needs. Twenty-seven respondents, or 39.7 percent of the sample indicated that friends helped to meet these needs.

CHAPTER VII  
LEARNING ABOUT SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

"How did you learn about the possibility of becoming a Single Parent by Choice?" was asked in order to find out how the single mothers by choice first learned about becoming single mothers by choice. Five categories were listed for response to the question. They are represented in Table 23 below:

TABLE 23  
HOW RESPONDENTS LEARNED OF BECOMING  
A SINGLE MOTHER BY CHOICE

<u>Source</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
My family gave me the idea	2	2.9%
I thought of it myself	41	60.3%
Other, please specify	9	13.2%
I read about it	9	13.2%
Friends and/or neighbors	4	5.95
Circumstances	1	1.5%
No Response	<u>2</u>	<u>2.9%</u>
	68	100.0%

The majority of the single mothers by choice thought of the idea themselves. Over 60 percent checked this category in answering the question.



### Final Questions

Two questions ended the questionnaire. The first was an open-ended question designed to get the women in the sample to describe their decision in their own words and to get at information that might not otherwise be covered in the questionnaire. This question read

Please describe your decision to become a single parent and the circumstances surrounding your decision. Use the back of this page and additional sheets if necessary.

This question yielded answers that ranged from one word to one liners to pages and pages of additional material. All of the responses are listed completely in the typed appendix at the end of this thesis. Quite a few of the respondents were very open and eager to share their experiences as single mothers.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY: PROFILE OF THE SINGLE MOTHER BY CHOICE

The woman who chooses to become a single mother by choice is likely to be divorced or single, over thirty years of age, white and has only one child. She has a better than average income, lives in a suburban/urban area and has a four year college degree or better. She is of a middle class background, is fairly stable financially, and employed. Religion is not important to her. She rarely attends religious services, although if she does identify with a particular denomination; she is likely to consider herself Jewish or Catholic.

Her family includes brothers and/or sister, and some of them support her decision to become a single mother by choice; although more of her friends are supportive.

Though she would rather be married, there was no "Mr. Right" at the right time and her "biological clock" is ticking too fast for her to wait around to have a child. She must have the child now, though she can wait until later for Mr. Right. Donor insemination and adoption were possibilities, but she chose to become

pregnant by a friend or lover. She put a good deal of thought into choosing the father of her child and considered his background, looks, intelligence, and her affection for him. He knows about the child, but has agreed to have little or no involvement with the child.

She has help with childcare; her child goes to the daycare center everyday, and her friends and family help babysit now and then. She needs little help financially, though family and friends sometimes help with "extras". She wishes there were more hours in the day, but overall she is very happy and satisfied with her decision to become a single mother. She would do it over again, is anxious to share her feelings about her experience with others, but she makes sure you understand that being a "single mother by choice" is not easy and it is not for everyone.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSIONS

Over 70 percent of the women included in this study are over 30 years of age. Almost 90 percent are presently single or divorced and even more were single or divorced when they got their first child. Over 85 percent are white.

Seventy-two percent finished a four-year college or more, with 41.2 percent finishing graduate school. Sixty-four of the 68 respondents are employed, either full or part-time. The most popular job fields are education, business, and psychology/counseling. Nearly 80 percent of the women earn over \$15,000 annually, while over 54 percent earn over \$25,000, and nearly 30 percent earn over \$25,000 yearly.

Most of the women indicated that their social class was the same as their parents, mostly lower-middle to upper middle class.

Over 85 percent of the sample lives in an urban to suburban area with substantial populations, usually over 50,000. The only shift in living areas was a small one from more rural and suburban areas as childhood residence areas to more urban and suburban areas as adult residences.

Only 13.2 percent were only children. Two-thirds had

one or two siblings in their family of origin, while 20.6 percent had four to six children included in their family of origin.

Only one respondent reported that she herself was an illegitimate child and one reported an illegitimate sibling. Hence, personal illegitimacy is not a conclusive factor in the decision to become a single mother by choice. Concern for their children and how to explain about "daddy" is more important to the single mother by choice.

The single mother by choice is most likely to be Jewish (or Catholic) or does not belong to a religious denomination. More than two-thirds of the sample do not consider themselves religious, and nearly 80 percent attend church services rarely or never.

Half of the women had supportive families upon hearing the news that she was to become a single mother by choice, while 75 percent reported having supportive friends. Families tended to become more supportive after the child was born or adopted, while friends gave their support more readily.

Though most of the women would LIKE to be married, they became single mothers by choice because the timing was not right for marriage at the present and their "biological clocks" were ticking. Most of them have had opportunities in the past to marry, but "wrong timing" was the most popular reason for not marrying previously. Almost 60 percent do intend to marry someday.

Almost 90 percent of the sample had only one child by choice. Nearly three-fourths of the sample became pregnant by friends or lovers. Ten percent became pregnant through donor insemination. Sixteen percent adopted through private means or public agencies.

Of those women who became pregnant, nearly 75 percent did so on purpose, while one-fourth did not. Nearly all became pregnant because they wanted a child.

Half of the sample put some thought into choosing the father of their child. Good health, physical attractiveness, intelligence and a love relationship with the father are prerequisites for choosing the father.

Forty-three of the respondents said that the father of their child has knowledge of the child's existence, while 8 of the 68 said that the father has no knowledge of the child. Even with knowledge of the child, it is not likely that the father will be involved on any level with the mother's or the child's life.

While 33 of the 68 respondents loved the father of the child when they became pregnant, only half of those (15) love him presently.

Eleven of the 68 respondents adopted: 4 through private agencies, 1 through a public agency and 6 through other means, including private lawyers, friends, and doctors.

Nine women chose donor insemination: 2 were inseminated at a hospital and 7 at a doctor's office.

Almost 90 percent of the single mothers by choice have help with childcare; daycare facilities being the most popular choice for assistance. Only 38.2 percent reported receiving any kind of financial help and many have other needs, emotional, physical, and financial that need to be met.

The majority of the sample came up with the idea to become a single mother by choice alone.

## CHAPTER X

### QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on single mothers by choice is needed in order to understand the changing structure of the American family. Such single people feel that they have the necessary resources, money and education to offer a child, especially single women. Married couples are no longer required in order for functional parenthood to take place.

Studies on the role of the single mother by choice in society and how support networks and structures can help the single mother are needed. Especially important are studies on single parents by choice that include the single father by choice. Research on single mothers by choice appears to be growing in the past five years, but rarely are single fathers by choice included.

Future research might include studies of the child of the single mother by choice. Is the child constantly reminded of his status, or is he or she allowed to live without the stigma of being "illegitimate" or coming from a "broken" home?



The single mother by choice differs from our typical image of the "unwed" mother. The unwed mother stereotype depicts a young, probably teenage, mother with few skills and very few resources to manage alone with a child to support. Since the single mother by choice is more likely to be educated, older and white; how do her support groups differ? What kinds of adjustments do the children of both these types of mothers have to make?

Studies on marriage and the delays involved with marriage due to career expansion for women should be noted. Single mothers by choice are not the only singles who would like to be married and are not. Research designed to get at reasons for delaying marriage and reasons for early marriage may help to find out why marriage "avoids" the single mother by choice who has never married.

Further research on single mothers by choice can only help us in understanding the future changes in store for the American family. New family forms are constantly being created and recognized. At some point in the future, perhaps they will be accepted as valid, and the children of these families as "legitimate". Perhaps distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate, or acceptable and unacceptable, will be eliminated entirely. First we have to discover the family forms being created.

## Appendix A: Single Mothers by Choice: Philosophy



*Single Mothers by Choice*

501 TWELFTH STREET BROOKLYN, NY 11215 (212) 965-2148

### SMC PHILOSOPHY

1. A Single Mother by Choice is a woman willing to take the initiative. Her child might be conceived naturally or by artificial insemination, or been adopted. What we all share is the decision to take on the responsibility of raising our children knowing, at the onset at least, that there will be no primary paternal caretaker. We do not include women who have had children and then were widowed or divorced because the emotional and practical implications of their situation can be quite different.
2. Our goals are to offer support and assistance to single mothers by choice, provide a peer group for our children, give information to those considering single parenthood so that they can make an informed decision and do public education when appropriate.
3. SMC is not an advocacy group. It is not fair to a child or woman if we urge her to get into an impractical or overextended situation, or one where there are a great many unresolved questions or deep concerns. Single parenting is difficult enough for those of us who are sure and prepared.
4. In general, our members feel that a good marriage is better than raising a child as a single parent. In the absence of a good marriage, with the divorce rate what it is, we feel we may be providing more stability and a better image of men by bearing or adopting children who will not be traumatized by divorce or poor relationships.
5. The majority of us are well established professional women who are able to support a child without recourse to public funds.
6. The word "Choice" in our title has two implications. The fact that we have made a serious and thoughtful decision in taking on the responsibility of raising a child by ourselves. That we have chosen not to be in a permanent relationship with a man rather than join one that is less than satisfactory.

Appendix B: Cover Letter to Sample Single Mothers By Choice

May 18, 1986

Kimberly Kay Harris  
207-E Wallace Street  
Warsaw, VA 22572

Dear Single Parent By Choice,

I am presently studying individuals who choose to have children without marriage. Very little is known about the single parent by choice. I have designed a study and prepared a questionnaire to learn more about individuals like yourself. The questionnaire takes about 20 minutes and asks about your decision to become a single parent and the circumstances surrounding your decision and the level of support given you and the child. This study is part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Sociology at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. A thesis committee comprised of three faculty members has approved this undertaking.

If you are willing to help me collect valuable information about single parents by choice, please fill out the attached questionnaire and mail it to me in the stamped pre-addressed envelope enclosed. I will not mention your name anywhere in the report and promise to protect your identity from others. Also, please return separately the enclosed postcard which will help me keep track of individuals who have returned the questionnaires. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kimberly Harris".

Kimberly Harris

## Appendix C: SINGLE PARENTS BY CHOICE SURVEY

1. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1a. How old were you when you had your natural or adopted child(ren)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your present marital status? (Please check one)
- ☐ single ☐ separated  
☐ married ☐ deserted  
☐ divorced
3. What was your marital status at the time of your child(ren)'s birth or adoption?  
(If you have more than one child, please list for each) 1st \_\_\_\_\_  
2nd \_\_\_\_\_ 3rd \_\_\_\_\_ 4th \_\_\_\_\_
4. How do you describe yourself?
- ☐ Hispanic ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native  
☐ Black ☐ White  
☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please check the box that indicates the highest level of education you have completed:
- ☐ some high school ☐ technical or business college  
☐ high school graduate ☐ 4-yr. college  
☐ some college ☐ some graduate school  
☐ 2-yr. college ☐ completed graduate school
- 5a. If you have a university degree(s), please indicate what kind and how many.  
(e.g., B.A. in History, M.Ed., etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your employment status? Are you
- ☐ employed part-time ☐ self-employed, part-time  
☐ employed full-time ☐ self-employed, full-time
- 6a. What is your occupation? Briefly describe what you do. (e.g., sales clerk at Sears, mathematician at engineering firm, R.N. at a hospital, etc.) Please be specific. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6b. Do you consider your work ☐ a job  
or ☐ a career?
- 6c. What is your approximate annual income?
- ☐ below \$5,000/yr. ☐ \$35,000 to \$44,999/yr.  
☐ \$5,000 to \$14,999/yr. ☐ \$45,000 to \$54,999/yr.  
☐ \$15,000 to \$24,999/yr. ☐ over \$55,000/yr.  
☐ \$25,000 to \$34,999/yr.

7. How would you describe your current social class position?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upper class        | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower middle class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upper middle class | <input type="checkbox"/> Working class      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle class       | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower class        |

7a. Where do you live now?

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> rural, farm | <input type="checkbox"/> rural, non-farm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> small town  | <input type="checkbox"/> suburban        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> city        |  |

7b. How large is the area in which you live?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> population--under 2,500      | <input type="checkbox"/> population--25,000 to 49,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> population--2,500 to 9,999   | <input type="checkbox"/> population--over 50,000      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> population--10,000 to 24,999 |   |

Questions 8-11 are about the family in which you grew up.

8. How would you describe your parents' social class position?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upper class        | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower middle class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upper middle class | <input type="checkbox"/> Working class      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle class       | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower class        |

8a. Where did you grow up?

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> rural, farm | <input type="checkbox"/> rural, non-farm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> small town  | <input type="checkbox"/> suburban        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> city        |  |

8b. How large was the area where you grew up?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> population--under 2,500      | <input type="checkbox"/> population--25,000 to 49,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> population--2,500 to 9,999   | <input type="checkbox"/> population--over 50,000      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> population--10,000 to 24,999 |   |

9. How many children, including yourself, were there in your family? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Were any of your brothers or sisters born outside of marriage? ☐ yes ☐ no

10a. If YES, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Were you born outside marriage? ☐ yes ☐ no

11a. If YES, how do you feel about it? (Are your feelings positive, negative, indifferent, etc.?) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your religious affiliation? (e.g., American Lutheran, Roman Catholic, A.M.E.Z., Southern Baptist, Conservative Jew, Methodist, none) Please be specific. \_\_\_\_\_

12a. Do you consider yourself religious? ☐ yes ☐ no

12b. How often do you attend religious services?

☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Seldom ☐ Never

13. What was your family's reaction to your decision to have a child outside marriage? (before the child became yours)

- ☐ favorable/supportive  
☐ indifferent/didn't care one way or the other  
☐ unfavorable/unsupportive  
☐ they did not know about it

13a. How did your friends react to your decision to have a child outside marriage? (before the child became yours)

- ☐ favorable/supportive  
☐ indifferent/they didn't care one way or the other  
☐ unfavorable/unsupportive  
☐ they did not know about it

14. Did you ever have the opportunity to marry? ☐ yes ☐ no

14a. If YES, could you have become a married parent? ☐ yes ☐ no

14b. If you could have married and had a child(ren), why did you choose NOT to marry? \_\_\_\_\_

14c. Do you ever intend to marry? ☐ yes ☐ no

15. How many children have you had outside of marriage? Please elaborate on whether the child was by choice, by unwanted pregnancy or by adoption and the year the child became yours.

Child	By Choice	Unwanted Pregnancy	Adoption	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Please answer the following questions about how your child(ren) became yours.

16. Did you obtain your child through

☐ your own pregnancy ☐ adoption ☐ donor insemination

\*\*\*\*If your child was ADOPTED, please SKIP to question #20.

17. Did you purposely become pregnant? ☐ yes ☐ no

17a. If YES, did you become pregnant because you wanted a child? ☐ yes ☐ no

17b. If NO, what was your reason for becoming pregnant? \_\_\_\_\_

17c. If NO, did you make the decision to become a single parent AFTER you became pregnant? ☐ yes ☐ no

If YES to 17c. why did you make this decision? (Use the back of this page if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_

18. Did you choose the father of your child? ☐ yes ☐ no

18a. If YES, how did you go about choosing the father? \_\_\_\_\_

19. Does the father of the child know about the child? ☐ yes ☐ no

19a. If YES, is he (or would he like to be) involved in the child's life?

☐ yes ☐ no

19b. If YES to 19a., how is he (or would he like to be) involved?(e.g. financially, emotional support for you/child, day-care for child, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

19c. If YES to 18 or 19, did you love the father of your child PRIOR to your pregnancy? ☐ yes ☐ no  
Do you love him now? ☐ yes ☐ no

\*\*\*\*If your child was ADOPTED, please answer question #20.

20. Was your child adopted through a

☐ private agency? ☐ public agency?

☐ other?(please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*If you were DONOR INSEMINATED, please answer question #21.

21. Where did your donor insemination take place?

☐ hospital

☐ doctor's office

☐ fertility clinic

☐ at home

Questions 22 through 24 are about your childcare arrangements and support.

22. Do you have others care for your child(ren)? ☐ yes ☐ no

22a. If YES, who cares for your child(ren)?

- ☐ own parents ☐ friends and/or neighbors  
☐ other family members ☐ child care facility  
☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

23. Do you receive financial help to support you and your child(ren)? ☐ yes ☐ no

23a. If YES, who provides financial assistance?(Check all that apply)

- ☐ own parents ☐ father of the child  
☐ other family members ☐ friends and/or neighbors  
☐ social agency ☐ Aid to Dependent Children  
☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

24. Are there other needs you and your child(ren) need to have met by others? ☐ yes ☐ no

24a. If YES, what are other important needs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are they adequately met? ☐ yes ☐ no

24b. If other needs exist and are met, who helps to meet these needs?

- ☐ own parents ☐ the father of the child  
☐ other family members ☐ friends and/or neighbors  
☐ social agency  
☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

25. How did you learn about the possibility of becoming a Single Parent By Choice?

- ☐ My family gave me the idea. ☐ I read about it.  
☐ I thought of it myself. ☐ A friend of mine suggested it.  
☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

26. Please describe your decision to become a single parent and the circumstances surrounding your decision. Use the back of this page and additional sheets if necessary.

27. Would you be willing to participate in another study on Single Parents By Choice? If so, please give your correct name and address in the space below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ P.O. Box #: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix A: Answers to Question #26

#1

I did not decide to become a single parent and then purposely go out and get pregnant. I got pregnant and then decided to keep the child. It wasn't a hard decision as I'd already had & had been caring for one child.

My 2nd child's father was still married and we chose not to alter that status. He's never seen the child, but does pay child support. The child we created is the best thing that's ever happened to me, and if I had to do it over again, and knew the child would be him, I would.

It is very difficult raising this child without a father as my other son has a father who is active in his life. It won't be much longer before I must try to explain the facts of life to him. Because of this, I can't imagine why any woman would purposely become a "Single parent by choice". The only "choice" I made was to keep the child--not to become pregnant.

#2

My life was full and complete. I decided a man would not expand my horizons or increase my happiness, but a child would.

I wanted a child that needed me as much as I could give. A birthchild would be welcome--but would not offer the challenge I asked. A foreign adoption I did (do) not believe in as I feel there is no guarantee that you are not in reality buying a baby--(stolen-or conceived for cash). I wanted a child whose life would be changed for the better and I would be unique in my ability to do so.

So through a public adoption agency I first fostered, then adopted my beautiful little boy. He has Down Syndrome; is of mixed black/hispanic/white heritage, the second child of a single 17 yr. old. He is everything I dreamed of -- we are perfectly matched. I have never regretted my choice. I thank the man upstairs (whoever he is) everyday for uniting my child and me. We are both what each needed and wanted to make our lives complete.

The family and to a lesser extent friends, have not been supportive until the rights of my son's birth parents were terminated. Now that he has been adopted he has been accepted. But I still find that it is not permissible (to them) to complain about

difficulties as I chose this situation and must live with it.

#3

A strong desire to parent was becoming paramount by age 31. I pursued my most important dream for 2½ years until it became a reality. At first, I researched the pros and cons of insemination vs. adoption. Becoming pregnant through a partner is not morally sound for me. I have no difficulty with insemination. After a year of trying each month with insemination with no resulting pregnancy, I began adoption proceedings. Adoption takes 2-7 years and it would have had to be a foreign adoption at that.

With the expertise of my doctor, an endocrinologist, an intensified infertility work-up and treatment was begun. An additional six months later I was blessed with conception. In total, it took me 18 months to conceive.

My baby is well worth every bit of pain, anxiety, and explanation I had to endure. There is not a day that goes by that I don't tell my precious baby, "You are too valuable for mommie. How lucky I am to have you. I love you!" My son is healthy, happy, and extraordinary.

#4

I had just turned 28 years old and was somewhat worried about time factors. I had always wanted children for many years. I started to date a man and we were BOTH aware of the circumstances. However, he did not want to stay involved with me once he realized I was pregnant. I was fortunate to have a healthy 8 lb. son who is approaching 4 years next month. I am extremely happy and satisfied with my decision to be a single parent. I see no need for a man to have to be involved in the upbringing of a child. Most fathers in families have little or no participation in the daily activities of a child. I don't feel my son will miss his "father" he never had. I would help him find him [his father] if that day should come. I also ended up in a paternity suit for the main purpose of his father being named as his father since the father's name could not be put on it [the birth certificate]. I felt that [it] was crucial for my son to know that. Being a single parent by choice allows me to love my son without the responsibilities a marriage brings. My time with my son is our own time together--selfish as that may be--I feel we are both fulfilled in other ways. After all, all you need is love...

#5

All my life that I can remember I've looked forward to becoming a parent. I love children, they love me and I've always known I had a talent with them. The idea of applying this talent to my own offspring has always interested me. When I was divorced at age 27 (with no children) I made up my mind that if I hadn't found the man for me by my mid-thirties, I'd simply proceed with my lifelong intention of becoming a parent through less traditional means.

It was never a question of to do it or not. It was only a question of when.

I spoke about about it openly to my friends, colleagues, and parents for years. When the time was finally right (ie. professionally and personally), I sought out a father (someone to father my child) and luckily quickly became pregnant. The only surprise to family and friends was that it took me so long! I'd been talking about it for 7 years before going ahead with my plan. I am lucky because I have strong family support, both emotionally and financially. I would not become a parent under any circumstances if I could not insure a certain level of quality of life for my child. I became a single parent by choice because I knew my parents were willing to help me reach my goals. Through their generosity, I've been able to stay home with my child for her first two years. I'm going back to work now and am becoming financially self-supporting as well. I believe it is important to examine your motives before becoming a single parent by choice. I don't think children should be born for reasons of neurotic needs. Once they've been born it's the parents' duty to tenderly nurture their hearts, souls, and minds, and then let them go. It was a duty I yearned for and do well.

#6

strong desire to be a parent, have a child--gave idea 5 years of thought--reading, talking to other single parents.

Determined that I had the social, financial, and mental capabilities to undertake this responsibility. Has been the most rewarding experience for me, and I believe, for my family.

#7

#8

As I approached my mid-30's, I had a clear intuition one day (I remember the day) that I could/would not wait to find Mr. Right but would have

a second child on my own--I had a 7 year old son at the time and never envisioned him being an only child. The simplest solution was to ask my former husband. He had proven to be a devoted father, "good genetic stock", and although we didn't want to/couldn't live together, we still loved each other. Considered the idea in detail many months and discussed it with him, family, friends, etc. Getting pregnant wasn't easy long distance (we live 1½ hours apart) plus discovered he had a low sperm count. But finally it happened! Pregnancy and the first 6 months were hardest alone, but now I am just "another single Mom". We did marry when I was 4½ months pregnant just to legitimize the birth (he strongly wanted to; I thought it was silly) and so far haven't bothered to divorce although we've never lived together as if we were married. I do have an excellent support system, a flexible job I love, financial security, and now a wonderful second son. It's not all a bed of roses, but I'm definitely glad I did it. It's not for everyone though--

#9

At age 30 while attending a Single Adult Conference sponsored by the Presbyterian church, I made the decision to become a single parent by artificial insemination. I decided it was time for me to take charge of my life and do what I wanted to do (become a mother) and no longer wait for "Prince Charming" to appear. I felt a tremendous burden lifted from my shoulders.

I came home and began to develop a support group of friends who were there to listen and offer support thru the long months of information gathering and preparation for the insemination, pregnancy, etc. They were and still are the most supportive group of friends I have ever had. Family members, especially my mother, were very hesitant about my decision.

Two years later I gave birth to twin boys by C-section. (They will be one year old next month). The birth of twins altered many of my original plans. Bedrest during pregnancy forced me to quit work earlier than anticipated and I had to use my savings to live on. Physically and emotionally I was unable to care for the twins by myself and work full-time. (Not enough hours in the day!) My mother has moved in with me to help care for the babies. Our relationship has improved 200% as we both know how much we need each other.

#10

I have always been very independent and felt somehow that I was responsible for carrying the world

on my shoulders. I've also always had a difficult time feeling that anyone could truly and genuinely love me for myself. These feelings, which I've been getting counseling for during the past few years, came out of my home situation which was interracial and alcoholic, in an all-white, conservative community, between 1945-1965. The men I chose to have in my life, or rather, who chose me, all needed a Mommy and were threatened by my desire for children. My self-esteem was so low that I didn't realize that I deserved better. I didn't want to marry my daughter's father or any of the other men I had had in my life because I knew that I'd have 2 kids (one being them) instead of only one.

I've always desperately wanted a baby, so the only alternative seemed to be to do it alone.

The men I date now and my feelings about myself have shifted 100%. If I knew I could have the type of loving relationship I have in my life now, when I was 34, I would not have chosen to be a single parent. It's been a difficult and worthwhile transition for me.

#11

On choosing the father: I met him after I had made the decision. He was here on business for several months. We started dating and really hit it off. During the dating period, I was able to find out things about him, his health history, childhood behaviorisms, family background, etc. Everything met my requirements + standards. I was careful about choosing a father because I wanted it to be right. I couldn't become pregnant with just anyone. I guess I'm a romantic. The first night I met Emily's father we stayed up until 4 a.m. talking in a diner. I felt I had known him for years. Had he not been an out-of-towner, I might have waited to see if our relationship would have developed. At the same time, the fact that he did live in another state appealed to me. I wouldn't have his interference. An absolutely absent father relationship is better than an unstable one. You can't miss something you never had.

After my second marriage ended in divorce, I realized what I wanted was to have a child more than I wanted to be in that marriage. I thought of becoming pregnant before we actually split, but I didn't want the complications of a part-time daddy and/or the emotional strains of my involvement with him. So my own research began about being a Single Mother By Choice. I read articles, books, talked to my doctor, psychologist, and finally decided that it was what I was going to do. I felt emotionally and financially stable and very much capable of providing all that was necessary to raise a child.

One other thing I'd like to share--when in the "thinking" stage, I talked to a friend of mine who said I was being selfish and not thinking of the "would be" child. (She never had a child). My response to her was that I felt it took more sacrifices to become a parent (single or otherwise) than to stay childless. To be able to give of yourself and not [do it], was more selfish!

#12

Pregnancy was accidental, but wanted for a long time. Father married already and abandoned us shortly after child's birth.

#13

My boyfriend and I had been living together on and off for approx. five years. However, there was one problem we could not work out without professional help and he was not willing to participate so we had trouble making our relationship into everything a good one needed to last. It also made me feel that I was inadequate as a woman; so I received professional help on my own---which convinced me that I was not to blame for the condition of our relationship--I had to accept the fact that he and I had different sexual preferences. When I became pregnant, it was not hard for me to make a choice about keeping the baby; I felt I needed the baby to keep a part of Mark's and my relationship with me, having invested so many years in the relationship. I did not know, of course, that Mark would stick around this long; I hoped he would, but was not sure. Our relationship is now as parents and best friends, with the realization that our son will be better off with our relationship this way. I also made the decision based on my income and health benefits, which paid for 100% of the Hospital and O.B.--My health plan for dental and eye care is also substantial, so medical bills are not and were never a major concern.

#15

It was something I wanted desperately from the age of 32. I went about it in a very irrational way, never really thinking it through.

#16

The proverbial "clock was running out". I am in a supportive environment, have an excellent job and felt that it was now or never.

#17

Impulsive decision to try at 4:00 p.m.; I was pregnant at 11:00 that same night.

#18

Became pregnant by accident at the age of 36--knew I always wanted marriage and children--10 wks. finally made the decision to keep after joining Single Mothers by Choice. Lost baby at 26 wks. After loss, was totally determined to have a child and adopted 1 year later!

#19

I was 33 years old, divorced, independent, trained in childcare, willing to share my life, be a role-model....

#20

I was 37 with no prospective mate in the picture, and I've always wanted to have children. I make enough money and have the energy and desire to raise a child by myself.

#21

I feel everyone should be part of a family--I had love to give, and I found 4 wonderful children to give it to!

#22

The father and I were living together for 2 months when when [I] first learned of [my] pregnancy. He encouraged me to have an abortion & I had had one previously 3 yrs. earlier and couldn't do it again. He was very hostile and unsupportive throughout the pregnancy. Stated that I was trying to trap him, to marry him for money (he was a physician). On several occasions, with his parents influence, asked me to marry him, there were no longer any good feelings.

I wanted the child and wanted it to grow up feeling good. How could it feel good unless I felt good. The child helped me to look at someone else besides myself and to look at what I wanted for us in the future.

My physician who was in family practice was very supportive. He saw me on a weekly basis and introduced me to other single parents (women) who never married when pregnant and did well. He also was very helpful in putting me in contact with community resources.

I love my son and would do it the same way again, only this time I would have left his father a lot sooner, had I realized that I didn't need him.

My son was three when I found the man who was good enough for him as a father. We are all very happy to feel fortunate enough to find one another.

Thank you for allowing me to participate.

#23

Both parents are necessary for a happy, healthy well-adjusted child. Like I said, since I was a child, I always pictured myself with children and never with a husband. I often said I wanted children after college, but I don't want to get married.

When I got pregnant, I told the father. He wanted me to get an abortion, I wanted the baby but I was willing to do what he wanted. He didn't ask for a baby and he had no rights, so I knew my choice to keep the baby would be unfair. So I asked him for emotional support throughout the abortion. He didn't care about me and didn't want to help so I ignored his feelings and listened to mine. The baby meant alot to me because I knew that I would be a better single parent than many parents are married. Since then, the father's attitude has changed.

#24

When I first suspected I might be pregnant, I was extremely upset and frightened. I had already had an abortion three years earlier, and although this had gone against what I believed in, I think I had dealt with that part of my life and put it behind me. In the beginning, I just couldn't picture myself having another abortion. I was afraid of what it might do to me emotionally. What helped me was that it took about four weeks from the time I missed my always regular period for it to finally be determined that I was indeed pregnant. I had a lot of time to think about what I wanted to do.

I realized that I wanted to go through with the pregnancy. I was 35 years old, on my own, wanting some connection of my own. (I really had never thought of the biological clock ticking inside of me.) The only reason I could think of for terminating my pregnancy is fear of what people would say. When I terminated my previous pregnancy, I rationalized



that an unmarried pregnancy would hurt my parents too much. This time, I realized that I had to do what I felt was right for me. My parents accepted the situation quite well. My baby would be their little grandchild and they really were grateful that everyone in the family was healthy and happy.

I had a relationship for sometime with the baby's father, but it had gone from quite intense to being a very casual thing. Even though I cared about him very much, I knew from the beginning that I was on my own.

Once I really got into my pregnancy, the notion of what people thought became very insignificant to me. I never did then, and do not now, avoid letting people know that I am unmarried.

My daughter is now six years old. It is very difficult to quickly summarize what the experience of having her has meant to me. Being a single mother is a very difficult, stressful way of life. I work full time for a law firm in New York City. It is a busy job with a strenuous commute. Weekdays, my daughter and I get home at 6:45 p.m., if we're lucky. Her day is spent in kindergarten and then with someone who is paid to take care of her. Much of the rest of our time is spent with just each other. My parents are getting older and not particularly well. While I know they are especially fond of my daughter, I cannot turn to them for support in the every day things. My three sisters are basically indifferent to her; they make no special effort towards her and do not try to pick up the slack for her missing father. Fortunately, I have some good friends, but there is still a void as far as family is concerned.

In spite of the emotional and physical stress involved, I have never felt one moment of regret for my decision. My life has been completely changed for the better. I feel I have reason to be proud of my daughter and of how I have been able to cope with raising her. She is a bright, happy little girl who gives me endless joy.

#25

First I would like to say that my account of this situation is probably different now than it would have been 4 years ago. I think I have become more honest with myself during the time in between.

Four years ago, I would have said "I was engaged to marry my daughter's father when I became pregnant...". I now think that a large part of my motivation to marry was a deep desire to have a child, along with a belief system which would not allow me to consider doing this outside of marriage, for the sake of the child.

I therefore became involved in a relationship which promised marriage, but anyone with any insight could have predicted a lousy prognosis for happiness in this relationship/marriage. I "chose" not to have any such insight until well after I was pregnant.

We did use birth control; however, we used "foam" only--(at the time, I was on the Board of Directors of the local family planning agency, and was well aware of the risk of pregnancy when using contraceptive foam only!)

When I first discovered I was pregnant my first feelings were of fear... fear of marrying and fear of not marrying, fear that I might lose my job if I remained single and pregnant, etc. At the same time, I felt a happiness and excitement deep down. There was never a moment's doubt about whether I would have this baby and keep it. The only questions were "under what circumstances?"

The father and I began counseling and it became increasingly clear to me (though not to him) that marriage between us was a downright insane option! Our values are too different.... the differences are extreme and the potential for conflict was immense. While I had reservations about depriving my daughter of a traditional nuclear family, I had far greater reservations about marrying her father and the long term negative results of that decision.

So by October, when I was three months pregnant, I had made a firm decision to become a "Single Mother by Choice"--

Of course there are many details I could include. There was conflict between [the father] and I during the pregnancy. However, coworkers, employer, friends, and family were wonderfully supportive throughout and continue to be to this day.

I had an easy pregnancy and was able to continue working until the Friday before [my child] was born.

[The father] did go to childbirth classes with me, and coached me through labor. He had wanted to be there for her birth and though I had reservations about it, I decided to agree. He was a terrific coach, but I still have mixed feelings about whether that was a wise decision.

The birth of my daughter brought joy to me beyond description. The experience of mothering her over these past four years has brought me unlimited happiness. She is a wonderful child, bright, healthy and happy.

When she was 10 months, we moved from the [West Coast to the Mid-West]. He father was minimally involved with her at that point--dropping by when it was convenient. He never provided any financial support and only agreed to babysit once. My extended

family live in [the area] and I thought it best for [my daughter] to have Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, and cousins actively involved in her life, since her father was not to be.

That was a difficult decision for me, as I'm not crazy about the Midwest and love the Northwest-- But I have not regretted it, as my family has been wonderful for us both (& us for them too, I think). I have a good job and I think [my daughter] is a fortunate child, all in all.

I still feel some sadness that she doesn't have a father living with her--who loves her as much as I do. But that sadness is not overwhelming. She has one parent who loves her very much--and lots of other people and family who adore her--so I don't think she's deprived.

As for me, I am thankful everyday of my life for the privilege of being her parent, and the joy of watching her grow. I look forward to the future and all the new experiences that each stage brings.

#26

When I wanted another child I tried with friends and acquaintances, but did not get pregnant. Then I found a fertility specialist through Planned Parenthood, and he treated me and did tests. I became pregnant through AI.

When my daughter was 4, I wanted a sibling for her and I have been working with an agency in Georgia to adopt a 6 year old girl from India.

As to why I had children:

- (1) There is no logical reason to have children. They are very expensive and totally useless. I just wanted them.
- (2) I wrote a whole book on the subject, called....

#27

#28

In brief I was married for 7 years to a physician. I got pregnant "by accident". He said he didn't want children. Within 3 months, he had left. I had an abortion and he had a new girlfriend. It took me 2 years to recover from that pain.

I later loved another man and again became pregnant. He also "wasn't ready" for children and so I had an abortion. At that time I vowed never to have another abortion because a man couldn't handle it.

Five years after my divorce I was dating someone I loved and cared for. I told him I wasn't using any contraception. It didn't seem to change his behavior at all. One night I knew I was in mid-cycle and thought of using a diaphragm. But as I was eating dinner, I excused myself and removed it. I thought that it was meant to be and now was the time and this was the man. It only took once I have never looked back. I have a daughter who is the joy of my life!

#30

I had a stable relationship with a woman I live with, a home that we had purchased together, a stable, steady income, an interesting job and outside interests and I still felt there was something very important lacking in my life and finally realized what it was.

It was the most difficult decision of my life and I spent much time thinking about it and discussing it with others. But I decided that it would be the right thing for me and I hoped it would be the right thing for the child, and for my lover.

Most of my concerns had to do with being a lesbian raising a child, rather than a single mother; which I considered to be less problematic. I still wonder about it, I pray that he [the child] does not suffer. Also, questions about being an only child which I knew he would be. I still wonder about that, too.

I had been envying women with babies for several years and had been actually contemplating doing it for 4 or 5 before actually going through with it. I read everything I could find on it (most of it was very negative, except for some recent articles in the NY times) and researched it to the best of my ability.

I thought about it constantly and did not decide to go ahead with it until I thought I had resolved all of the issue of concern to me: the stability of my relationship; finances, ability and willingness of my lover to assume child care; my own resolved feelings having to do with a conflicted relationship with my own mother; dealing with the negativity that I knew would come from my own family (which did happen); etc.

My pregnancy was very good, exciting, and pleasurable, with notable exceptions: my family's reaction--my mother being the most negative, suggesting that I would have a retarded child, etc; the unstated responses of neighbors; and my own fears about the reaction of co-workers (which it turned out were unfounded); problems with kidney during the final part of the pregnancy.

Also, I should add that I told my doctor that I was a lesbian and after the first visit, she recommended that I speak with a psychiatrist to make sure that it was the right decision. This set me back several months (having been in therapy for years beforehand and knowing myself fully capable of understanding my own abilities and motives) while I decided whether or not to go through with it. I finally decided that I did not want to see a psychiatrist, call my GYM/OB (a young woman my own age) and told her that I wanted to go ahead w/out the [psychiatric consultation] and to my surprise she agreed.

My lover and another close friend were present at the birth and it was great. (Also my MD was due on the same day I was, but she was late and so was able to deliver my baby. I had a healthy son and he is the joy of my life.

What else can I say? --No job repercussions.  
 --total family acceptance following the birth.  
 --total acceptance/involvement by lover and friends.  
 --neighbors 50/50.

#31

I wanted a child and was already 40 and had failed with 3 long-term relationships with men--so I knew I had to do it alone or not have a child.

#32

I was 37 yrs. old, wanted a child and no possibility of marrying the man I was involved with. I decided to have the child & tried for 6 months to get pregnant. I then broke off with the man and had decided to go to Alaska to look up an old friend/boyfriend who would volunteer when presto -- on a brief "making up" I became pregnant. Am still friends, but not romantically involved with child's father.

#33

I was 36 when I realized that my time to have children was limited and that if I didn't do so quickly I might lose the option. I felt I could always meet a husband and was willing to put the search for one aside & make a child my first priority for a few years. I could not imagine the idea of life as a single person forever -- a child was a responsibility that I felt confident I could handle.

#34

I wanted very much to have child(ren). I was 37 and financially independent and truly understood that

parenthood and marriage are not inseperable. Since my time for children was limited, but not my time for marriage, I started one before the other.

#35

I was getting older and I wanted a child, I love the man, but knew we wouldn't marry, I thought he would agree to father my child and be supportive, but I was wrong. My child is terrific and beautiful and the best thing I ever did.

#36

I was 34, biological clock ticking louder, tired of waiting for "Mr. Right", wanted a baby for a few years, had never been pregnant, feared that this might be my only chance.

#37

Time was running out. I wanted a child. (I'd like more!, but no man and no money). The time was right and so was the man.

#38

#39

I always knew that if I wasn't married by my late 30's that I would have a child on my own.

#40

#41

#42

I was getting older --37 & had not found the man to marry. Wanted very much to have a child and thought that motherhood and marriage did not necessarily have to go together. I worried a great deal about having a fatherless child, but decided to do it anyway. Adoption was not my first "try". I tried intercourse with boyfriends, artificial insemination, and finally, when nothing happened, I decided I couldn't wait any longer and began adoption work. It took 2 years to adopt--finding the source and finally getting a newborn. It's the best thing I ever did in my life. It would be nice to find the right man and I may still, but meanwhile I have not missed the chance to be a mother!

#43

#44

At 35, I broke up with a man I was planning on marrying. I spent a year mourning the fact that I'd never have a child when a friend suggest I conceive out of wedlock. She was from a working class culture and all of her sisters had done so. I approached my family as I felt I needed their support and they were quite enthusiastic. Gave myself the rest of that year (8 months) to plan and began adoption.

#45

I had always felt that I would have a child someday. I would rather have done it the "regular" way (marriage first), but as the "biological clock" ticks louder and louder, I decided that, one way or another I would have a child. I set my time for "marriage first" at age 29 and a baby before 30. If I wasn't married by then, I would work at getting pregnant. When I unintentionally became pregnant at age 28, it was a true blessing! I was estatic! (& still haven't come down) Having my son is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me.

#46

Best thing I've ever done--it has taught me love. I was 36, disillusioned politically and with men and decided to have a family alone.

#47

I always wanted to be a mother, I never wanted to be a wife.

#48

I could sum up most of my decision as having a strong desire to have a child, which was compounded by biological factors. I am a D.E.S. daughter, I have had my left tube and ovary removed due to an ectopic pregnancy, and had  $\frac{1}{4}$  of my right ovary removed due to cysts. I currently must undergo a colposcopy exam every 6 months for cancer screening. Needless to say, my need to have a child, while I still could was certainly a press!

I have never been raised conservatively and was not concerned about societal taboos.

My lover and I were not yet ready to commit to marriage, although we have since married. (We married when our son was 11 months old).

I saw a show on morning T.V. which had a woman, Linda Lee, who was a Single Mother by Choice, who wrote a book about her experience which I read. I

also went to a Thinker's Meeting of the New York Single Mothers' by Choice group, which was also very helpful.

#49

I had always thought about it since I was about 13, didn't see why you couldn't be a parent just because you didn't want to marry. I felt my "biological clock" was running out. I had not met a man I would marry. I always wanted to have a child. I made good money and owned property--have a very secure job. I felt I was old enough and "settled down" enough.

I did marry when my son was two. I married someone I had been friends with for ten years. Beleive me, if I had it to do over again, I would have stayed single--to me, marriage is nothing but work and I think I was right in my original decision to not marry. My husband is not the father of my child.

One of the things that influenced me to marry was I felt my son needed a father and my husband is a good father to him.

#50

#51

I decided to become a single parent on my own. I wanted a baby. I knew her father wasn't ready to settle down, he was having too much fun. I wanted a baby & I think we are doing pretty good. Her father has married now, I know he still cares a lot. But I want nothing to do with him. Still single, want more kids, but would like to get married this time. Want 4 more kids at least.

#52

The "biological clock" concept applies. I very much wanted to be a parent. It was "time".

#53

I was age 31. Had previously tried for 6 months to have a baby with a previous boyfriend who probably would married me but we broke up after he left the Navy and moved on. I was desperately afraid to be without my own child as I grew older--and I was basically introverted and not that social and saw no prospects for a real marriage proposal. I feared sterility. I fell in love with an ex-classmate and became pregnant after our first sexual encounter knowing full well I was ovulating and having informed



him so. (I have ovulation pain at my mid-cycle and always show symptoms of ovulation midway during my menstrual cycle). I was delighted despite the fact that the Black middle class from where I and the baby's father originate are arch-conservative on unwed pregnancy. I've always been rebellious, somewhat socialist in thought, and a dabbler in the occult, so while I sometimes feel like an Ethiopian Hester Prynne (Scarlet Letter). I feel joyous that I've created this marvelous little being. My religious/occult background led me to believe that to give life in such a spontaneous way is truly magnificent. I wish I could get married, but I don't dwell on the thought (anymore).

#54

At 30 & divorced, I decided to take action to have a child I'd wanted for years. I almost remarried so that I could have a child before I got too old--I realized he was the wrong person, but I almost married him just to have a chance. Fortunately I came to my senses before I made a second mistake.

Once I had my daughter, I got my act together and became the happiest person in the world. When my daughter was 7 months old, I began dating a wonderful man who I married 6 months later (6/83). He adopted my little girl as soon as we were married. We now have a second daughter who was born 4/86.

I'm so glad I had my little girl. It was like getting a second chance at life.

#55

#56

I have always wanted children and a husband, but when I approached 30 & no one suitable had entered my life I decided to have a child on my own. I can't tell you in words the joy and happiness my daughter has brought me. She is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I was very, very scared of the social stigma involved with having an "illegitimate" child. Thank heaven most people don't look down on a person who has chosen to have a child on her own anymore. I hope I can explain to my daughter when the time comes, I chose single parenthood.

I was surprised at the support from family and friends when I told them I was pregnant and unmarried. I spent several years planning and preparing for a child both financially and emotionally. I knew that I was on my own and my life would change drastically. For me it was the best change. I don't recommend single parenthood for everyone but for those considering the possibility I

would say prepare for it and talk to others who have chosen single parenthood. They are the best teachers.

I love my daughter and I don't think she will be deprived because she does not have a full time father. She has me! If I can, I would like to have another child in a few years. The next time I will chose donor insemination.

#57

I always wanted a family. I adopted an adolescent as I feel they need homes as well as any child. An older child was also better for my work schedule.

#58

I had used birth control until age 30, even during my 6-yr. marriage. I divorced, and stopped using birth control. I met my daughter's father, dated, and fell in love with him. During my pregnancy, I realized there would never be a future for us, but I knew abortion was not for me, and I could not give up a baby I had waited so long to have. Since the pregnancy, he has drifted in and out of my life, presently he's been out for the past 2 years. I truly believe that at the point I decided to keep the baby, God blessed us in such a way that she does not want for anything. We have a nearly full life except for a loving mate for me and a father for my daughter, but the lord will provide in his time.

#59

#60

The decision to become a mother was as visceral and irrational as for any woman, married or single; it was simply unthinkable that I should not have a child. At 36, I decided I hadn't any time left for finding a husband (a matter over which I had little practical control) before having a baby (a matter over which I thought had considerable practical control). So I forged ahead, thinking that I had a lifetime to make and maintain a good marriage, but only a short time to have a baby.

After a year of trying with a consenting boyfriend and AID, I proved infertile. By that time, my desire to have a child was at such a fever pitch and my commitment so profound that I adopted.

#61

I fell in love with a gentleman. We lived together in a loving relationship intending to marry

eventually, the pregnancy was planned... the relationship soured. A problem arose not concerning the child that brought out negativity I could not live with. There was never a question as to what to do with the baby. She has become a kind, loving little friend I would die without.

#62

We have no immediate family except my 25 year old sister, the family unit is very important to me so I'd like to see more programs matching children to seniors or big brothers and sisters.

For a good year prior to my becoming pregnant I knew I wanted a child and when I met [my child's] father, I knew he was the one and I decided to go for it, knowing full well that I'd be raising a child alone. Single parenting is very difficult at times, but rewarding and wonderful also, I'd do it again!

#63

As mentioned above, I wanted a child--although marriage did not seem to be in the future.

#64

After 4 unsuccessful pregnancies in 4 years of marriage, I built a new life as a single woman, but never gave up the hope of motherhood. At the age of 35, I decided to adopt, while in the process of international adoption, a soon-to-be born child became available through a physician friend. My son was given over to my custody at the age of 2 days.

#65

My biological clock was ticking, no Mr. Right in sight so I decided to have a baby. I chose artificial insemination because there would be no legal problems, the donor would be intelligent and healthy, no legal problems, and it was a socially acceptable alternative for my family. My doctor picked the donor and fresh sperm was used since it's more successful than frozen sperm.

I carried the specimen which I picked up at one local hospital to another one where I was inseminated. It's been three years since my daughter Jessica was born. I've never regretted my decision. She has touched my life, added new meaning far greater than I had anticipated. Regrets? Not one!

#66

I was with the father of my baby girl during the

last 9 years. I [have known] him [for] sixteen years. He is married. We [have]..always [been] very close, and have a lot of friends in common. We travel in [Puerto Rico] and New York during any conference of his work or mine. He loves [children]. But when I told him that I was pregnant, he decided not to see me again. Anyway, he contin[ued] with me (not in the same manner] during the pregnancy and he went to see me at the hospital the night of the delivery. He returned to see the baby at my home (I live alone) ...2 months later. His wife knows [about our relationship] (after 9 years!!!) and after [the] day [he came to see the baby at my house], he never returned the house, he never again saw the baby, however, he always wants photos of the baby and last month he enroll[ed] her in his family medical plan. The baby is now 15 months old. I hope that someday, he wants to see his baby and give her a good night kiss. Good luck, Kimberly.

#67

Many factors [were] involved in my decision, some of which are:

1. My own miserable childhood and terrible mother--I wanted somehow to undo the damage done to me.

2. A few abortions--and I couldn't justify another one. There was no reason not to have this baby.

3. For the first time in my life, I had taken control of my life, left a rotten relationship and packed it all up and moved. It was a great high for me to feel in charge of my destiny--no more helplessness. The child inside me captured all that somehow. Out of chaos comes creation, life, birth. The news that I was pregnant filled me with unspeakable joy and I knew everything would be alright.

4. Always wanted a baby and wasn't afraid to do it.

Aside: Pregnancy was one of the happiest times I have ever had. I was very healthy, radiant, beautiful and in charge. I changed my lifestyle, gave up drugs, ate healthy foods. Dreams became charged with power and wisdom. I planned the birth alone and everything was exactly as I'd wished. I began to write poetry. Enjoyed being alone, occasional periods of depression and loneliness. Worked hard (2 jobs) for seven months. The whole experience made me a stronger woman. Having done that alone, I know I can do anything. Future filled with hope.

Pregnancy and motherhood taught me patience and tolerance. My son is a beautiful child--smart (too

smart?), healthy, active, mischievous, comical. He has filled a void that I wasn't aware existed. Sometimes it's hard for me to remember life before the birth--and I certainly can't imagine life without him. As far as my "career" goes, I'm content to wait until he's old enough for more day care. I still nurse him, so when he's weaned and walking, I will begin to pursue my own interests. As far as the father is concerned--I wrote him when I found out I was pregnant--asked him to what extent he wished to involve himself. His response was to advise me to give the child up for adoption. The thought had never occurred to me--and I told him it was out of the question. Communication ceased between us, a mutual decision. Sometimes I wonder what HE wonders--but I figure if he was interested he knows how and where to find me. He's sure missing out on something wonderful. Of course, everyday, I deal with the guilt of raising him fatherless and wonder about any psychological damage he [my son] may suffer because of my decision. I hope to marry someday--for myself (I long now for the sharing and companionship after a long day with a 1 yr. old) and for [my son]--to provide him with a male image strong enough to balance my female image.

Having moved from Washington, D.C., left my lover of two years, quit my great job, and set myself up alone in [a new town], I figured my three missed periods were due to "hormonal problems" and stress related to the drastic changes I had undergone in the past months. By the third month, however, I decided it was time for a test, still believing that I couldn't be and wasn't pregnant. The night before I went for my test, I had an incredible dream of empowerment and I think it was that dream that gave me the strength to go through with the pregnancy alone. When the woman at the clinic told me the results, I cried for joy-- an experience I had never had before. The dream has stuck with me and whenever things become very difficult I go back to it and get recharged. (An Indian medicine woman gives me a basket shaped like ♀ --containing deeply symbolic gifts like eagles wings, cats' eyes, wolf strength...) I have never regretted my decision to have my baby. Being pregnant was blissful and he has brought me incredible love and wisdom. Birth at home--idyllic. He is happy and healthy and I am, too.

#68

I had just decided my second marriage was a mistake and would not work. My first marriage was ruined by Vietnam, and lack of personal growth on my part. I was too "young" to handle having come from

what I now know was a dysfunctional family, as well as a years' separation from my 1st husband, as was he, and could not deal constructively with his mental and emotional problems when he returned from Nam. There was no help available from the V.A. or anywhere for 'Nam vets then. Five years after his return, we split rather than risk my murder-his suicide, which seemed very likely. We still "loved" each other, but I represented a past he couldn't return to (and still can't adjust to even now).

After four years of dating, with and without sexual promiscuity, and finally deciding to "fall in love with" an alcoholic who reminded me of my 1st ex-husband, he broke off our relationship for another alcoholic (I'm not). Emotionally exhausted, I found another alcoholic who was somewhat more stable (with a "good" job) and married him, for financial security basically, with his knowledge. Meanwhile, I'd been attending college part-time and was 2 or 3 classes short of an associate degree. When my second husband got laid off, he started drinking full-time, which I could not handle or tolerate, as he was physically and verbally abusive. I gave him 3 months to shape up or I'd ship out and moved to a separate bedroom. No progress was made even in 6 months, so I filed for divorce.

After giving my ultimatum, I started seeing a guy (my child's father) basically out of loneliness, whom I had know for almost 6 years. He had recently split with his fiancée, and was open to company. He had just bought a house nearby and was convenient to visit, casually. We ended up having sex on several occasions and though I wasn't on the pill, but brought condoms, we never made a big issue of birth control. Sometimes we'd use them and sometimes he'd take them off. I found out later that he thought he was sterile. He hadn't been aware that his ex-fiancée was on the pill.

After seeing him for 10 months (and having sex with him 9 times total), I found myself pregnant. I had considered the possibility with him openly and we joked about it and he'd stated he'd like to father my child. I had fantacized and discussed with a girlfriend, the possibility of becoming pregnant by him, and decided he met almost all of my "requirements" for a good father, biologically, as well as financially--his owning a house represented stability to me as I'd not had one since I'd left my parents home. I'd moved 13 times in 14 years and been through countless relationships and I was tired, exhausted, emotionally and mentally to the place where I almost (?) bought the "IF/When I get pregnant, he'll want me to move in with him" fantasy." I didn't want to marry at that time, pregnant or not and didn't really pressure him about

marriage. I just told him I was pregnant and he did a U-turn and suggested I get an abortion. I had wanted a baby since my first husband and I were married and this was the first time I'd ever been pregnant. I realized the father and I wouldn't have a good relationship, but did hope he would come around and be involved with our child. Instead, he denied paternity, insisted on a trial by jury, was found to be the father by jury and then promptly moved out of state when he was financially able. He has since married the woman he had moved into his house (to keep me away) whom he got pregnant (before he married her). He openly admitted that is why he married her. Really pick winners, don't I?

I have since read "Women Who Love Too Much" and finally recognize my problem(s) stems from being raised in a dysfunctional family, not alcoholic, but workaholic, but have paralleled emotionally to relate. I now am attending al-anon and [I am] growing up emotionally.

I'm glad I didn't pressure him into marriage "for the baby's sake" and because of my singleness, have the opportunity to grow and let our daughter escape that pattern finally.

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